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JANUARY

Weird Tales

15¢

Outer World Monstrosities . . .

"The Hog"

WILLIAM HOPE HODGSON

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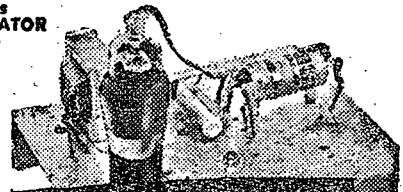

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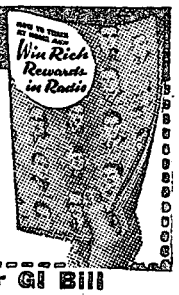

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Weird Tales

ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

JANUARY, 1947 Cover by A. R. Tilburne

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NOVELETTES

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Except for personal experiences, the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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Vol. 39, No. 9

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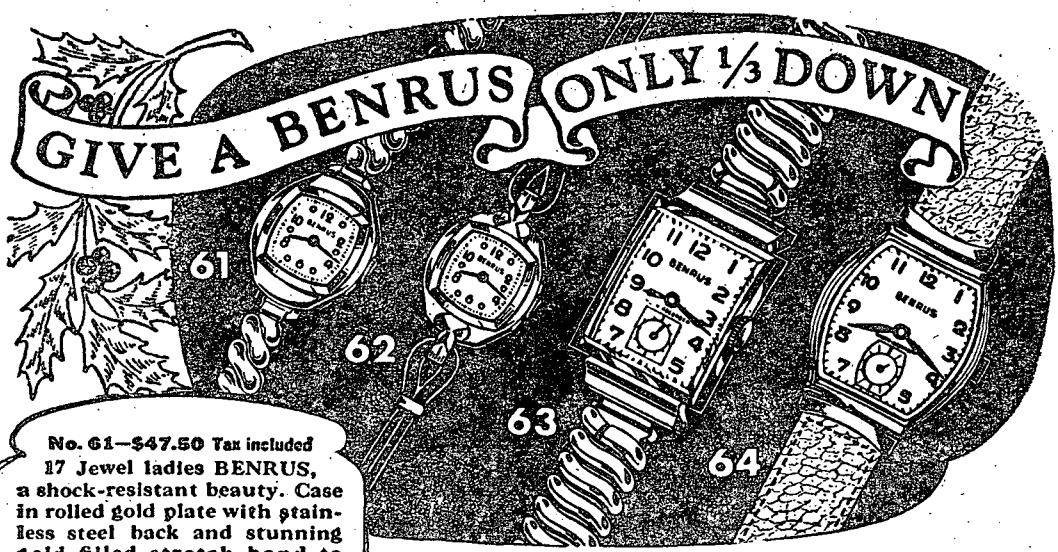

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THE MOB
THE KING OF SHADOWS
THE HOUSE BEYOND MIDNIGHT
SHADOW OF MELAS
THE FINAL HOUR
THE EXTRA PASSENGER
CELLMATE
THERE WAS AN OLD WOMAN
THE HANDLER

Here's a list of nine stories in this issue. Won't you let us know which three you consider the best? Just place the numbers: 1, 2, and 3 respectively against your three favorite tales—then clip it out and send it to us.

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STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., required by the Acts of Congress of August 24, 1912, and March 3, 1933, of WEIRD TALES, published bi-monthly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1946. State of New York, County of New York, ss.

Before me a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared William J. Delaney, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the President-Treasurer of WEIRD TALES and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager are: *Publisher*, SHORT STORIES, INC., 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.; *Editor*, D. McIlwraith, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.; *Managing Editor*, None; *Business Manager*, William J. Delaney, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

2. That the owner is: SHORT STORIES, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.; William J. Delaney, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contains statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustee, hold stock and securities in a capcity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

(*Signed*) WILLIAM J. DELANEY, *President*.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 18th day of September, 1946.

[SEAL] (*Signed*) HENRY J. PAUROWSKI.

Notary Public, State of New York. Residing in Bronx Co. No. 23, Reg. No. 51-P-7; Cert. filed in N. Y. Co. No. 243, Reg. No. 180-P-7.

My commission expires March 30, 1947.

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The Hog

BY WILLIAM HOPE HODGSON

WE HAD finished dinner and Carnacki had drawn his big chair up to the fire, and started his pipe. Jessop, Arkwright, Taylor and I had each of us taken up our favorite positions, and waited for Carnacki to begin.

"What I'm going to tell you about happened in the next room," he said, after drawing at his pipe for a while. "It has been a terrible experience. Doctor Witton first brought the case to my notice. We'd been chatting over a pipe at the club one night about an article in the *Lancet*, and Witton mentioned having just such a similar case in a man called Bains. I was interested at once. It was one of those cases of a gap or flaw in a man's protection barrier, I call it. A failure to be what I might term efficiently insulated—spiritually—from the outer monstrosities.

"From what I knew of Witton, I knew he'd be no use. You all know Witton. A decent sort, hard-headed, practical, stand-no-kind-of-nonsense sort of man, all right at his own job when that job's a fractured leg or a broken collarbone; but he'd never have made anything of Bains's case."

For a space Carnacki puffed meditatively at his pipe, and we waited for him to go on with his tale.

"I told Witton to send Bains to me," he resumed, "and the following Saturday he came up. A little sensitive man. I liked him as soon as I set eyes on him. After a bit, I got him to explain what was troubling him, and questioned him about what Doctor Witton had called his 'dreams.'

"'They're more than dreams,' he said, 'they're so real that they're actual experiences to me. They're simply horrible. And yet there's nothing very definite in them to tell you about. They generally come just as I am going off to sleep. I'm hardly over before suddenly I seem to have got down into some deep, vague place with some inexplicable and frightful horror all about me. I can never understand what it is, for I never see anything, only I always get a sudden knowledge like a warning that I have got down into some terrible place—a sort of hell-place I might call it, where I've no business ever to have wandered; and the warning is always insistent—even imperative—that I must get out, get out, or some enormous horror will come at me.'

"'Can't you pull yourself back?' I asked him. 'Can't you wake up?'

"'No,' he told me. 'That's just what I can't do, try as I will. I can't stop going along this labyrinth of hell as I call it to myself, towards some dreadful unknown Horror. The warning is repeated, ever so strongly—almost as if the *live* me of my waking moments was awake and aware. Something seems to warn me to wake up, that whatever I do I *must* wake, wake, and then my consciousness comes suddenly alive and I know that my body is there in the bed, but my essence or spirit is still down there in that hell, wherever it is, in a danger that is both unknown and inexpressible; but so overwhelming that my whole spirit seems sick with terror.

"'I KEEP saying to myself all the time that I must wake up,' he continued, 'but it is as if my spirit is still down there, and as if my consciousness knows that some tremendous invisible Power is fighting against me. I know that if I do not wake then, I shall never wake up again, but go down deeper and deeper into some stupen-

Beware that monstrous horror which calls our souls to destruction!

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Heading by LEE BROWN COYE

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dous horror of soul destruction. So then I fight. My body lies in the bed there, and *pulls*. And the power down there in that labyrinth exerts itself too so that a feeling of despair, greater than any I have ever known on this earth, comes on me. I know that if I give way and cease to fight, and do *not* wake, then I shall pass out—out to that monstrous Horror which seems to be silently calling my soul to destruction.

" 'Then I make a final stupendous effort,' he continued, 'and my brain seems to fill my body like the ghost of my soul. I can even open my eyes and see with my brain, or consciousness, out of my own eyes. I can see the bedclothes, and I know just how I am lying in the bed; yet the real me is down in that hell in terrible danger. Can you get me?' he asked.

" 'Perfectly,' I replied.

" 'Well, you know,' he went on, 'I fight and fight. Down there in that great pit my very soul seems to shrink back from the call of some brooding horror that impels it silently a little further, always a little further round a visible corner, which if I once pass I know I shall never return again to this world. Desperately I fight; brain and consciousness fighting together to help it. The agony is so great that I could scream were it not that I am rigid and frozen in the bed with fear.

" 'Then, just when my strength seems almost gone, soul and body win, and blend slowly. And I lie there worn out with this terrible extraordinary fight. I have still a sense of a dreadful horror all about me, as if out of that horrible place some brooding monstrosity had followed me up, and hangs still and silent and invisible over me, threatening me there in my bed. Do I make it clear to you?' he asked. 'It's like some monstrous Presence."

" 'Yes,' I said. 'I follow you.'

"The man's forehead was actually covered with sweat, so keenly did he live again through the horrors he had experienced.

"After a while he continued:

" 'Now comes the most curious part of the dream or whatever it is,' he said. 'There's always a sound I hear as I lie there exhausted in the bed. It comes while the bedroom is still full of the sort of atmosphere of monstrosity that seems to come up with me when I get out of that place. I hear the sound coming up out of that enormous depth, and it is always the noise of pigs—pigs grunting, you know. It's just simply dreadful. The dream is always the same. Sometimes I've had it every single night for a week, until I fight not to go to sleep; but, of course, I have to sleep sometimes. I think that's how a person might go mad, don't you?' he finished.

"I nodded, and looked at his sensitive face. Poor beggar! He had been through it, and no mistake.

" 'Tell me some more,' I said. 'The grunting—what does it sound like exactly?'

" 'It's just like pigs grunting,' he told me again. 'Only much more awful. There are grunts, and squeals and pig-howls, like you hear when their food is being brought to them at a pig-farm. You know those large pig farms where they keep hundreds of pigs. All the grunts, squeals and howls blend into one brutal chaos of sound—only it is isn't a chaos. It all blends in a queer horrible way. I've heard it. A sort of swinish clamoring melody that grunts and roars and shrieks in chunks of grunting sounds, all tied together with squealings and shot through with pig howls. I've sometimes thought there was a definite beat in it; for every now and again there comes a gargantuan GRUNT, breaking through the million pig-voiced roaring—a stupendous GRUNT that comes in with a beat. Can you understand me? It seems to shake everything. . . . It's like a spiritual earthquake. The howling, squealing, grunting, rolling clamor of swinish noise coming up out of that place, and then the monstrous GRUNT rising up through it all, an ever-recurring beat out of the depth—the voice of the swine-mother of monstrosity beating up from below through the chorus of mad swine-hunger. . . . It's no use! I can't explain it. No one ever could. It's just terrible! And I'm afraid you're saying to yourself that I'm in a bad way; that I want a change or a tonic; that I must buck up or I'll land myself in a madhouse. If only you could understand! Doctor Witton seemed to half understand, I thought, but I know he's only sent me to you as a sort of last hope. He thinks I'm booked for the asylum. I could tell it.'

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" 'Nonsense!' I said. 'Don't talk such rubbish. You're as sane as I am. Your ability to think clearly what you want to tell me, and then to transmit it to me so well that you compel my mental retina to see something of what you have seen stands sponsor for your mental balance.

" 'I am going to investigate your case, and if it is what I suspect, one of those rare instances of a "flaw" or "gap" in your protective barrier (what I might call your spiritual insulation from the Outer Monstrosities) I've no doubt we can end the trouble. But we've got to go properly into the matter first, and there will certainly be danger in doing so.'

" 'I'll risk it,' replied Bains. 'I can't go on like this any longer.'

" 'Very well,' I told him. 'Go out now, and come back at five o'clock. I shall be ready for you then. And don't worry about your sanity. You're all right, and we'll soon make things safe for you again. Just keep cheerful and don't brood about it.' "

2

"I PUT in the whole afternoon preparing my experimenting room, across the landing there, for his case. When he returned at five o'clock I was ready for him and took him straight into the room.

"It gets dark now about six-thirty, as you know, and I had just nice time before it grew dusk to finish my arrangements. I prefer always to be ready before the dark comes.

"Bains touched my elbow as we walked into the room.

" 'There's something I ought to have told you,' he said, looking rather sheepish. 'I've somehow felt a bit ashamed of it.'

" 'Out with it,' I replied.

"He hesitated a moment, then it came out with a jerk.

" 'I told you about the grunting of the pigs,' he said. 'Well, I grunt, too, I know it's horrible. When I lie there in bed and hear those sounds after I've come up, I just grunt back as if in reply. I can't stop myself. I just do it. Something makes me. I never told Doctor Witton that. I couldn't. I'm sure now you think me mad,' he concluded.

"He looked into my face, anxious and queerly ashamed.

" 'It's only the natural sequence of the abnormal events, and I'm glad you told me,' I said, slapping him on the back. It follows logically on what you had already told me. I have had two cases that in some way resembled yours.'

" 'What happened?' he asked me. 'Did they get better?'

" 'One of them is alive and well today, Mr. Bains,' I replied. 'The other man lost his nerve, and fortunately for all concerned he is dead.'

"I shut the door and locked it as I spoke, and Bains stared round, rather alarmed, I fancy, at my apparatus.

" 'What are you going to do?' he asked. 'Will it be a dangerous experiment?'

" 'Dangerous enough,' I answered, 'if you fail to follow my instructions absolutely in everything. We both run the risk of never leaving this room alive. Have I your word that I can depend on you to obey me whatever happens?'

"He stared round the room and then back at me.

" 'Yes,' he replied. And, you know, I felt he would prove the right kind of stuff when the moment came.

"I began now to get things finally in train for the night's work. I told Bains to take off his coat and his boots. Then I dressed him entirely from head to foot in a single thick rubber combination-overall, with rubber gloves, and a helmet with earflaps of the same material attached.

"I dressed myself in a similar suit. Then I began on the next stage of the night's preparations.

"First I must tell you that the room measures thirty-nine feet by thirty-seven, and has a plain board floor over which is fitted a heavy, half-inch rubber covering.

"I HAD cleared the floor entirely, all but the exact center where I had placed a glass-legged, upholstered table, a pile of vacuum tubes and batteries, and three pieces of special apparatus which my experiment required.

" 'Now Bains,' I called, 'come and stand over here by this table. Don't move about. I've got to erect a protective "barrier" round

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us, and on no account must either of us cross over it by even so much as a hand or foot, once it is built.'

"We went over to the middle of the room, and he stood by the glass-legged table while I began to fit the vacuum tubing together round us.

"I intended to use the new spectrum 'defense' which I have been perfecting lately. This, I must tell you, consists of seven glass vacuum circles with the red on the outside, and the color circles lying inside it, in the order of orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet.

"The room was still fairly light, but a slight quantity of dusk seemed to be already in the atmosphere, and I worked quickly.

"Suddenly, as I fitted the glass tubes together I was aware of some vague sense of nerve-strain, and glancing round at Bains who was standing there by the table I noticed him staring fixedly before him. He looked absolutely drowned in uncomfortable memories.

" 'For goodness' sake stop thinking of those horrors,' I called out to him. 'I shall want you to think hard enough about them later; but in this specially constructed room it is better not to dwell on things of that kind till the barriers are up. Keep your mind on anything normal or superficial—the theatre will do—think about that last piece you saw at the Gaiety. I'll talk to you in a moment.'

"Twenty minutes later the 'barrier' was completed all round us, and I connected up the batteries. The room by this time was greying with the coming dusk, and the seven differently colored circles shone out with extraordinary effect, sending out a cold glare.

" 'By jove!' cried Bains, 'that's very wonderful—very wonderful!'

"My other apparatus which I now began to arrange consisted of a specially made camera, a modified form of phonograph with earpieces instead of a horn, and a glass disk composed of many fathoms of glass vacuum tubes arranged in a special way It had two wires leading to an electrode constructed to fit round the head.

"By the time I had looked over and fixed up these three things, night had practically come, and the darkened room shone most strangely in the curious upward glare of the seven vacuum tubes.

" 'Now Bains,' I said, 'I want you to lie on this table. Now put your hands down by your sides and lie quiet and think. You've just two things to do,' I told him. 'One is to lie there and concentrate your thoughts on the details of the dream you are always having, and the other is not to move off this table whatever you see or hear, or whatever happens, unless I tell you. You understand, don't you?'

" 'Yes,' he answered, 'I think you may rely on me not to make a fool of myself. I feel curiously safe with you, somehow.'

" 'I'm glad of that,' I replied. 'But I don't want you to minimize the possible danger too much. There may be horrible danger. Now, just let me fix this band on your head,' I added, as I adjusted the electrode. I gave him a few more instructions, telling him to concentrate his thoughts particularly upon the noises he heard just as he was waking, and I warned him again not to let himself fall asleep. 'Don't talk,' I said, 'and don't take any notice of me. If you find I disturb your concentration keep your eyes closed.'

"He lay back and I walked over to the glass disk, arranging the camera in front of it on its stand in such a way that the lens was opposite the center of the disk.

"I HAD scarcely done this when a ripple of greenish light ran across the vacuum tubes of the disk. This vanished, and for maybe a minute there was complete darkness. Then the green light rippled once more across it—rippled and swung round, and began to dance in varying shades from a deep heavy green to a rank ugly shade; back and forward, back and forward.

"Every half second or so there shot across the varying greens a flicker of yellow, an ugly, heavy repulsive yellow, and then abruptly there came sweeping across the disk a great beat of muddy red. This died as quickly as it came, and gave place to the changing greens shot through by the unpleasant and ugly yellow hues. About every seventh second the disk was submerged, and the other colors momentarily blotted out by the great beat of heavy, muddy red which swept over everything.

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" 'He's concentrating on those sounds,' I said to myself, and I felt queerly excited as I hurried on with my operations. I threw a word over my shoulder to Bains.

" 'Don't get scared, whatever happens,' I said. 'You're all right!'

"I proceeded now to operate my camera. It had a long roll of specially prepared paper ribbon in place of a film or plates. By turning the handle the roll passed through the machine exposing the ribbon.

"It took about five minutes to finish the roll, and during all that time the green lights predominated; but the dull heavy beat of muddy red never ceased to flow across the vacuum-tubes of the disk at every seventh second. It was like a recurrent beat in some unheard and somehow displeasing melody.

"Lifting the exposed spool of paper ribbon out of the camera I laid it horizontally in the two 'rests' that I had arranged for it on my modified gramaphone. Where the paper had been acted upon by the varying color lights which had appeared on the disk, the prepared surface had risen in curious, irregular little waves.

"I unrolled about a foot of the ribbon and attached the loose end to an empty spool-roller (on the opposite side of the machine) which I had geared to the driving clockwork mechanism of the gramaphone. Then I took the diaphragm and lowered it gently into place above the ribbon. Instead of the usual needle the diaphragm was fitted with a beautifully made metal-filament brush, about an inch broad, which just covered the whole breadth of the ribbon. This fine and fragile brush rested lightly on the prepared surface of the paper, and when I started the machine the ribbon began to pass under the brush, and as it passed, the delicate metal-filament 'bristles' followed every minute inequality of those tiny, irregular wave-like excrescences on the surface.

"I PUT the earpieces to my ears, and instantly I knew that I had succeeded in actually recording what Bains had heard in his sleep. In fact, I was even then hearing 'mentally' by means of his effort of memory. I was listening to what appeared to be the faint, far-off squealing and grunting of countless swine. It was extraordinary, and at the same time, exquisitely horrible and vile. It frightened me, with a sense of my having come suddenly and unexpectedly too near to something foul and most abominably dangerous.

"So strong and imperative was this feeling that I twitched the earpieces out of my ears, and sat a while staring round the room trying to steady my sensations back to normality.

"The room looked strange and vague in the dull glow of light from the circles, and I had a feeling that a taint of monstrosity was all about me in the air. I remembered what Bains had told me of the feeling he'd always had after coming up out of 'that place'—as if some horrible atmosphere had followed him up and filled his bedroom. I understood him perfectly now—so much so that I had mentally used almost his exact phrase in explaining to myself what I felt.

"Turning round to speak to him I saw there was something curious about the center of the 'defense.'

"Now, before I tell you fellows any more I must explain that there are certain, what I call 'focussing,' qualities about this new 'defense' I've been trying.

"The Sigsand manuscript puts it something like this: 'Avoid diversities of color; nor stand ye within the barrier of the color lights; for in color hath Satan a delight. Nor can he abide in the Deep if ye adventure against him armed with red purple. So be warned. Neither forget that in blue, which is God's color in the Heavens, ye have safety.'

"You see, from that statement in the Sigsand manuscript I got my first notion for this new 'defense' of mine. I have aimed to make it a 'defense' and yet have 'focussing' or 'drawing' qualities such as the Sigsand hints at. I have experimented enormously, and I've proved that reds and purples—the two extreme colors of the spectrum are fairly dangerous; so much so that I suspect they actually 'draw' or 'focus' the outside forces. Any action or 'meddling' on the part of the experimentalist is tremendously enhanced in its effect if the action is taken within barriers composed of these colors, in certain proportions and tints.

"In the same way blue is distinctly a 'general defense.' Yellow appears to be neu-

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tral and green a wonderful protection within limits. Orange, as far as I can tell, is slightly attractive, and indigo is dangerous by itself in a limited way, but in certain combinations with the other colors it becomes a very powerful defense. I've not yet discovered a tenth of the possibilities of these circles of mine. It's a kind of color organ upon which I seem to play a tune of color combinations that can be either safe or infernal in its effects. You know I have a keyboard with a separate switch to each of the color circles.

"Well, you fellows will understand now what I felt when I saw the curious appearance of the floor in the middle of the 'defense.' It looked exactly as if a circular shadow lay, not just on the floor, but a few inches above it. The shadow seemed to deepen and blacken at the center even while I watched it. It appeared to be spreading from the center outwardly, and all the time it grew darker.

"I was watchful, and not a little puzzled; for the combination of lights that I had switched on approximated a moderately safe 'general defense.' Understand, I had no intention of making a focus until I had learnt more. In fact, I meant that first investigation not to go beyond a tentative inquiry into the kind of thing I had got to deal with.

"I knelt down quickly and felt the floor with the palm of my hand, but it was quite normal to the feel, and that reassured me that there was no Saaaiti mischief abroad; for that is a form of danger which can involve, and make use of, the very material with the 'defense' itself. It can materialize out of everything except fire.

"As I knelt there I realized all at once that the legs of the table on which Bains lay were partly hidden in the ever blackening shadow, and my hands seemed to grow vague as I felt at the floor.

"I got up and stood away a couple of feet so as to see the phenomenon from a little distance. It struck me then that there was something different about the table itself. It seemed unaccountably lower.

"'It's the shadow hiding the legs,' I thought to myself. 'This promises to be interesting; but I'd better not let things go too far.'

"I called out to Bains to stop thinking so hard. 'Stop concentrating for a bit,' I said; but he never answered, and it occurred to me suddenly that the table appeared to be still lower.

"'Bains,' I shouted, 'stop thinking a moment.' Then in a flash I realized it. 'Wake up, man! Wake up!' I cried.

"He had fallen over asleep—the very last thing he should have done; for it increased the danger twofold. No wonder I had been getting such good results! The poor beggar was worn out with his sleepless nights. He neither moved or spoke as I strode across to him.

"'Wake up!' I shouted again, shaking him by the shoulder.

"My voice echoed uncomfortably round the big empty room; and Bains lay like a dead man.

"As I shook him again I noticed that I appeared to be standing up to my knees in the circular shadow. It looked like the mouth of a pit. My legs from the knees downwards, were vague. The floor under my feet felt solid and firm when I stamped on it; but all the same I had a feeling that things were going a bit too far, so striding across to the switchboard I switched on the 'full defense.'

"Stepping back quickly to the table I had a horrible and sickening shock. The table had sunk quite unmistakably. Its top was within a couple of feet of the floor, and the legs had that foreshortened appearance that one sees when a stick is thrust into water. They looked vague and shadowy in the peculiar circle of dark shadows which had such an extraordinary resemblance to the black mouth of a pit. I could see only the top of the table plainly with Bains lying motionless on it; and the whole thing was going down, as I stared, into that black circle."

3

"THERE was not a moment to lose, and like a flash I caught Bains round his neck and body and lifted him clean up into my arms off the table. And as I lifted him he grunted like a great swine in my ear.

"The sound sent a thrill of horrible funk through me. It was just as though I held

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a hog in my arms instead of a human. I nearly dropped him. Then I held his face to the light and stared down at him. His eyes were half opened, and he was looking at me apparently as if he saw me perfectly.

"Then he grunted again. I could feel his small body quiver with the sound.

"I called out to him. 'Bains,' I said, 'can you hear me?'

"His eyes still gazed at me; and then, as we looked at each other, he grunted like a swine again.

"I let go one hand, and hit him across the cheek, a stinging slap.

" 'Wake up, Bains!' I shouted. 'Wake up!' But I might as well have hit a corpse. He just stared up at me. And, suddenly I bent lower and looked into his eyes more closely. I never saw such a fixed, intelligent, mad horror as I saw there. It knocked out all my sudden disgust. Can you understand?

"I glanced round quickly at the table. It stood there at its normal height; and, indeed, it was in every way normal. The curious shadow that had somehow suggested to me the black mouth of the pit had vanished. I felt relieved; for it seemed to me that I had entirely broken up any possibility of a partial 'focus' by means of the full 'defense' which I had switched on.

"I laid Bains on the floor, and stood up to look round and consider what was best to do. I dared not step outside of the barriers, until any 'dangerous tensions' there might be in the room had been dissipated. Nor was it wise, even inside the full 'defense,' to have him sleeping the kind of sleep he was in; not without certain preparations having been made first, which I had not made.

"I can tell you, I felt beastly anxious. I glanced down at Bains, and had a sudden fresh shock; for the peculiar circular shadow was forming all round him again, where he lay on the floor. His hands and face showed curiously vague, and distorted, as they might have looked through a few inches of faintly stained water. But his eyes were somehow clear to see. They were staring up, mute and terrible, at me, through that horrible darkening shadow.

"I stooped, and with one quick lift, tore him up off the floor into my arms, and for the third time he grunted like a swine, there in my arms. It was damnable.

"I stood up, in the barrier, holding Bains, and looked about the room again; then back at the floor. The shadow was still thick round about my feet, and I stepped quickly across to the other side of the table. I stared at the shadow, and saw that it had vanished; then I glanced down again at my feet, and had another shock; for the shadow was showing faintly again, all round where I stood.

"I moved a pace, and watched the shadow become invisible; and then, once more, like a slow stain, it began to grow about my feet.

"I moved again, a pace, and stared round the room, meditating a break for the door. And then, in that instant, I saw that this would be certainly impossible; for there was something indefinite in the atmosphere of the room—something that moved, circling slowly about the barriers.

"I glanced down at my feet, and saw that the shadow had grown thick about them. I stepped a pace to the right, and as it disappeared, I stared again round the big room —and somehow it seemed tremendously big and unfamiliar. I wonder whether you can understand.

"As I stared I saw again the indefinite something that floated in the air of the room. I watched it steadily for maybe a minute. It went twice completely round the barrier in that time. And, suddenly, I saw it more distinctly. It looked like a small puff of black smoke.

"And then I had something else to think about; for all at once I was aware of an extraordinary feeling of vertigo, and in the same moment, a sense of sinking—I was sinking bodily. I literally sickened as I glanced down, for I saw in that moment that I had gone down, almost up to my thighs into what appeared to be actually the shadowy, but quite unmistakable, mouth of a pit. Do you understand? I was sinking down into this thing, with Bains in my arms.

"A feeling of furious anger came over me, and I swung my right foot forward with a fierce kick. I kicked nothing tangible, for I went clean through the side of the shadowy thing, and fetched up against the table, with a crash. I had come through

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something that made all my skin creep and tingle—an invisible, vague something which resembled an electric tension. I felt that if it had been stronger, I might not have been able to charge through as I had. I wonder if I make it clear to you?

"I whirled round, but the beastly thing had gone; yet even as I stood there by the table, the slow greying of a circular shadow began to form again about my feet.

"I stepped to the other side of the table, and leaned against it for a moment; for I was shaking from head to foot with a feeling of extraordinary horror upon me, that was in some way, different from any kind of horror I have ever felt. It was as if I had in that one moment been near something no human has any right to be near, for his soul's sake. And abruptly, I wondered whether I had not felt just one brief touch of the horror that the rigid Bains was even then enduring as I held him in my arms.

"Outside of the barrier there were now several of the curious little clouds. Each one looked exactly like a little puff of black smoke. They increased as I watched them, which I did for several minutes; but all the time as I watched, I kept moving from one part to another of the 'defense,' so as to prevent the shadow forming round my feet again.

"PRESENTLY, I found that my constant changing of position had resolved into a slow monotonous walk round and round, inside the 'defense'; and all the time I had to carry the unnaturally rigid body of poor Bains.

"It began to tire me; for though he was small, his rigidity made him dreadfully awkward and tiring to hold, as you can under stand; yet I could not think what else to do; for I had stopped shaking him, or trying to wake him, for the simple reason that he was as wide awake as I was, mentally; though but physically inanimate, through one of those partial spiritual disassociations which he had tried to explain to me.

"Now I had previously switched out the red, orange, yellow and green circles, and had on the full 'defense' of the blue end of the spectrum—I knew that one of the repelling vibrations of each of the three colors: blue, indigo and violet were beating out protectingly into space; yet they were proving insufficient, and I was in the position of having either to take some desperate action to stimulate Bains to an even greater effort of will than I judged him to be making, or else to risk experimenting with fresh combinations of the 'defensive' colors.

"You see, as things were at that moment, the danger was increasing steadily; for plainly, from the appearance of the air of the room outside the barrier there were some mighty dangerous tensions generating. While inside the danger was also increasing; the steady recurrence of the shadow proving that the 'defense' was insufficient.

"In short, I feared that Bains in his peculiar condition was literally a 'doorway' into the 'defense'; and unless I could wake him or find out the correct combinations of circles necessary to set up stronger repelling vibrations against that particular danger, there were very ugly possibilities ahead. I felt I had been incredibly rash not to have foreseen the possibility of Bains falling asleep under the hypnotic effect of deliberately paralleling the associations of sleep.

"Unless I could increase the repulsion of the barriers or wake him there was every likelihood of having to chose between a rush for the door—which the condition of the atmosphere outside the barrier showed to be practically impossible—or of throwing him outside the barriers, which, of course, was equally not possible.

"All this time I was walking round and round inside the barrier, when suddenly I saw a new development of the danger which threatened us. Right in the center of the 'defense' the shadow had formed into an intensely black circle, about a foot wide.

"This increased as I looked at it. It was horrible to see it grow. It crept out in an ever-widening circle till it was quite a yard across.

"Quickly I put Bains on the floor. A tremendous attempt was evidently going to be made by some outside force to enter the defense, and it was up to me to make a final effort to help Bains to 'wake up.' I took out my lancet and pushed up his left coat sleeve.

"What I was going to do was a terrible risk, I knew, for there is no doubt that in some extraordinary fashion blood attracts.

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"THE Sigsand mentions it particularly in one passage which runs something like this: 'In blood there is the Voice which calleth through all space. Ye Monsters in ye Deep hear, and hearing, they lust. Likewise hath it a greater power to reclaim backward ye soul that doth wander foolish adrift from ye body in which it doth have natural abiding. But woe unto him that doth spill ye blood in ye deadly hour; for there will be surely Monsters that shall hear ye Blood Cry.'

"That risk I had to run. I knew that the blood would call to the outer forces, but equally I knew that it should call even more loudly to that portion of Bains' 'Essence' that was adrift from him, down in those depths.

"Before lancing him, I glanced at the shadow. It had spread out until the nearest edge was not more than two feet away from Bains' right shoulder; and the edge was creeping nearer, like the blackening edge of burning paper, even while I stared. The whole thing had a less shadowy, less ghostly appearance than at any time before. And it looked simply and literally like the black mouth of a pit.

"'Now, Bains,' I said, 'pull yourself together, man. Wake up!' And at the same time as I spoke to him, I used my lancet quickly but superficially.

"I watched the little red spot of blood well up, then trickle round his wrist and fall to the floor of the 'defense.' And in the moment that it fell the thing that I had feared happened. There was a sound like a low peal of thunder in the room, and curious deadly-looking flashes of light rippled here and there along the floor outside the barrier.

"Once more I called to him, trying to speak firmly and steadily as I saw that the horrible shadowy circle had spread across every inch of the floor space of the center of the 'defense,' making it appear as if both Bains and I were suspended above an unutterable black void—the black void that stared up at me out of the throat of that shadowy pit.

And yet, all the time I could feel the floor solid under my knees as I knelt beside Bains holding his wrist.

"'Bains!' I called once more, trying not to shout madly at him. 'Bains, wake up! Wake up, man! Wake up!'

"But he never moved, only stared up at me with eyes of quiet horror that seemed to be looking at me out of some dreadful eternity."

4

"BY THIS time the shadow had blackened all around us, and I felt that strangely terrible vertigo coming over me again. Jumping to my feet I caught up Bains in my arms and stepped over the first of the protective circles—the violet, and stood between it and the indigo circle, holding Bains as close to me as possible so as to prevent any portion of his helpless body from protruding outside the indigo and blue circles.

"From the black shadowy mouth which now filled the whole of the center of the 'defense' there came a faint sound—not near but seeming to come up at me out of unknown abysses. Very, very faint and lost it sounded, but I recognized it as unmistakably the infinitely remote murmur of countless swine.

"And that same moment Bains, as if answering the sound, grunted like a swine in my arms.

"There I stood between the glass vacuum tubes of the circles, gazing dizzily into that black shadowy pit-mouth, which seemed to drop sheer into hell from below my left elbow.

"Things had gone so utterly beyond all that I had thought of, and it had all somehow come about so gradually and yet so suddenly, that I was really a bit below my natural self. I felt mentally paralyzed, and could think of nothing except that not twenty feet away was the door and the outer natural world; and here was I face to face with some unthought-of danger, and all adrift, what to do to avoid it.

"You fellows will understand this better when I tell you that the bluish glare from the three circles showed me that there were now hundreds and hundreds of those small smoke-like puffs of black cloud circling round and round outside the barriers in an unvarying, unending processsion.

"And all the time I was holding the rigid body of Bains in my arms, trying not to

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give way to the loathing that got me each time he grunted. Every twenty or thirty second he grunted, as if in answer to the sounds which were almost too faint for my normal hearing. I can tell you, it was like holding something worse than a corpse in my arms, standing there balanced between physical death on the one side and soul destruction on the other.

"Abruptly, from out of the deep that lay so close that my elbow and shoulder overhung it, there came again a faint, marvellously faint murmur of swine, so utterly far away that the sound was as remote as a lost echo.

"Bains answered it with a pig-like squeal that set every fibre in me protesting in sheer human revolt, and I sweated coldly from head to foot. Pulling myself together I tried to pierce down into the mouth of the great shadow when, for the second time, a low peal of thunder sounded in the room, and every joint in my body seemed to jolt and burn.

"In turning to look down the pit I had allowed one of Bains' heels to protrude for a moment slightly beyond the blue circle, and a fraction of the 'tension' outside the barrier had evidently discharged through Bains and me. Had I been standing directly inside the 'defense' instead of being 'insulated' from it by the violet circle, then no doubt things might have been much more serious. As it was, I had, psychically, that dreadful *soiled* feeling which the healthy human always experiences when he comes too closely in contact with certain Outer Monstrosities.

"The physical effects were sufficiently interesting to mention; for Bains's left foot had been ripped open, and the leg of his trousers was charred to the knee, while all round the leg were numbers of bluish marks in the form of irregular spirals.

"I stood there holding Bains, and shaking from head to foot. My head ached and each joint had a queer numbish feeling; but my physical pains were nothing compared with my mental distress. I felt that we were *done!* I had no room to turn or move for the space between the violet circle which was the innermost, and the blue circle which was the outermost of those in use was thirty-one inches, including the one inch of the indigo circle. So you see I was forced to stand there like an image, fearing each moment lest I should get another shock, and quite unable to think what to do.

"I daresay five minutes passed in this fashion. Bains had not grunted once since the 'tension' caught him, and for this I was just simply thankful; though at first I must confess I had feared for a moment that he was dead.

"No further sounds had come up out of the black mouth to my left, and I grew steady enough again to begin to look about me, and think a bit. I leaned again so as to look directly down into the shadowy pit. The edge of the circular mouth was now quite defined, and had a curious solid look, as if it were formed out of some substance like black glass.

"BELOW the edge, I could trace the appearance of solidity for a considerable distance, though in a vague sort of way. The center of this extraordinary phenomenon was simple and unmitigated blackness—an utter velvety blackness that seemed to soak the very light out of the room down into it. I could see nothing else, and if anything else came out of it except a complete silence, it was the atmosphere of frightening suggestion that was affecting me more and more every minute.

"I turned away slowly and carefully, so as not to run any risks of allowing either Bains or myself to expose any part of us over the blue circle. Then I saw that things outside of the blue circle had developed considerably; for the odd, black puffs of smoke-like cloud had increased enormously and blent into a great, gloomy, circular wall of tufted cloud, going round and round and round eternally, and hiding the rest of the room entirely from me.

"Perhaps a minute passed, while I stared at this thing; and then, you know, the room was shaken slightly. This shaking lasted for three or four seconds, and then passed; but it came again in about a half a minute, and was repeated from time to time. There was a queer oscillating quality in the shaking, that made me think suddenly of that *Jarvee Haunting* case. You remember it?

"There came again the shaking, and a ripple of deadly light seemed to play round

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the outside of the barrier; and then, abruptly, the room was full of a strange roaring—a brutish enormous yelling, grunting storm of swine-sounds.

"They fell away into a complete silence, and the rigid Bains grunted twice in my arms, as if answering. Then the storm of swine noise came again, beating up in a gigantic riot of brute sound that roared through the room, piping, squealing, grunting, and howling. And as it sank with a steady declination, there came a single gargantuan grunt out of some dreadful throat of monstrousness, and in one beat, the crashing chorus of unknown millions of swine came thundering and raging through the room again.

"There was more in that sound than mere chaos—there was a mighty develish rhythm in it. Suddenly, it swept down again into a multitudinous swinish whispering and minor gruntings of unthinkable millions; and then with a rolling deafening bellow of sound came the single vast grunt. And, as if lifted upon it the swine roar of the millions of the beasts beat up through the room again; and at every seventh second, as I knew well enough without the need of the watch on my wrist, came the single storm beat of the great grunt out of the throat of unknowable monstrosity—and in my arms, Bains, the human, grunted in time to the swine melody—a rigid grunting monster there in my two arms.

"I TELL you from head to foot I shook and sweated. I believe I prayed; but if I did I don't know what I prayed. I have never before felt or endured just what I felt, standing there in that thirty-one inch space, with that grunting thing in my arms, and the hell melody beating up out of the great Deeps; and to my right, 'tensions' that would have torn me into a bundle of blazing tattered flesh, if I had jumped out over the barriers.

"And then, with an effect like a clap of unexpected thunder, the vast storm of sound ceased; and the room was full of silence and an unimaginable horror.

"This silence continued. I want to say something which may sound a bit silly; but the silence seemed to *trickle* round the room. I don't know why I felt it like that; but my words give you just what I seemed to feel, as I stood there holding the softly grunting body of Bains.

"The circular, gloomy wall of dense black cloud enclosed the barrier as completely as ever, and moved round and round and round, with a slow, 'eternal' movement. And at the back of that black wall of circling cloud, a dead silence went trickling round the room, out of my sight. Do you understand at all? . . .

"It seemed to me to show very clearly the state of almost insane mental and psychic tension I was enduring. . . . The way in which my brain insisted that the silence was *trickling* round the room, interests me enormously; for I was either in a state approximating a phase of madness, or else I was, psychically, tuned to some abnormal pitch of waredness and sensitiveness in which silence had ceased to be an abstract quality, and had become to me a definite concrete element, much as (to use a stupidly crude illustration), the invisible moisture of the atmosphere becomes a visible and concrete element when it becomes deposited as water. I wonder whether this thought attracts you as it does me?

"And then, you know, a slow awaredness grew in me of some further horror to come. This sensation or knowledge or whatever it should be named, was so strong that I had a sudden feeling of suffocation. . . . I felt that I could bear no more; and that if anything else happened, I should just pull out my revolver and shoot Bains through the head, and then myself, and so end the whole dreadful business.

"This feeling, however, soon passed; and I felt stronger and more ready to face things again. Also, I had the first, though still indefinite, idea of a way in which to make things a bit safer; but I was too dazed to see how to 'shape' to help myself efficiently.

"And then a low, far-off whining stole up into the room, and I knew that the danger was coming. I leaned slowly to my left, taking care not to let Bains's feet stick over the blue circle, and stared down into the blackness of the pit that dropped sheer into some Unknown, from under my left elbow.

"The whining died; but far down in the blackness, there was something—just a re-

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mote luminous spot. I stood in a grim silence for maybe ten long minutes, and looked down at the thing. It was increasing in size all the time, and had become much plainer to see; yet it was still lost in the far, tremendous Deep.

"Then, as I stood and looked, the low whining sound crept up to me again, and Bains, who had lain like a log in my arms all the time, answered it with a long, animal-like whine, that was somehow newly abominable.

"A very curious thing happened then; for all around the edge of the pit, that looked so peculiarly like black grass, there came a sudden, luminous glowing. It came and went oddly, smouldering queerly round and round the edge in an opposite direction to the circling of the wall of black, tufted cloud on the outside of the barrier.

"THIS peculiar glowing finally disappeared, and, abruptly, out of the tremendous Deep, I was conscious of a dreadful quality or 'atmosphere' of monstrousness that was coming up out of the pit. If I said there had been a sudden *waft* of it, this would very well describe the actuality of it; but the spiritual sickness of distress that it caused me to feel, I am simply stumped to explain to you. It was something that made me feel I should be soiled to the very core of me, if I did not beat it off from me with my will.

"I leaned sharply away from the pit towards the outer of the burning circles. I meant to see that no part of my body should overhang the pit whilst that disgusting power was beating up out of the unknown depths.

"And thus it was, facing so rigidly away from the center of the 'defense,' I saw presently a fresh thing; for there was something, many things, I began to think, on the other side of the gloomy wall that moved everlastingly around the outside of the barrier.

"The first thing I noticed was a queer disturbance of the ever circling cloud-wall. This disturbance was within eighteen inches of the floor, and directly before me. There was a curious, 'puddling' action in the misty wall; as if something were meddling with it. The area of this peculiar little disturbance could not have been more than a foot across, and it did not remain opposite to me; but was taken round by the circling of the wall.

"When it came past me again, I noticed that it was bulging slightly inwards towards me; and as it moved away from me once more, I saw another similar disturbance, and then a third and a fourth, all in different parts of the slowly whirling black wall; and all of them were no more than about eighteen inches from the floor.

"When the first one came opposite me again, I saw that the slight bulge had grown into a very distinct protuberance towards me.

"All around the moving wall, there had now come these curious swellings. They continued to reach inwards, and to elongate; and all the time they kept in a constant movement.

"Suddenly, one of them broke, or opened, at the apex, and there protruded through, for an instant, the tip of a pallid, but unmistakable *snout*. It was gone at once, but I had seen the thing distinctly; and within a minute, I saw another one poke suddenly through the wall, to my right, and withdraw as quickly. I could not look at the base of the strange, black, moving circle about the barrier without seeing a swinish snout peep through momentarily, in this place or that.

"I stared at these things in a very peculiar state of mind. There was so great a weight of the abnormal about me, before and behind and every way, that to a certain extent it bred in me a sort of antidote to fear. Can you understand? It produced in me a temporary dazedness in which things and the horror of things became less real. I stared at them, as a child stares out from a fast train at a quickly passing night-landscape, oddly hit by the furnaces of unknown industries. I *want* you to try to understand.

"In my arms Bains lay quiet and rigid; and my arms and back ached until I was one dull ache in all my body; but I was only partly conscious of this when I roused momentarily from my psychic to my physical awaredness, to shift him to another position, less intolerable temporarily to my tired arms and back.

"There was suddenly a fresh thing—a low but enormous, solitary grunt came rolling, vast and brutal into the room. It made

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the still body of Bains quiver against me, and he grunted thrice in return, with the voice of a young pig.

"HIGH up in the moving wall of the barrier, I saw a fluffing out of the black tufted clouds; and a pig's hoof and leg, as far as the knuckle came through and pawed a moment. This was about nine or ten feet above the floor. As it gradually disappeared I heard a low grunting from the other side of the veil of clouds which broke out suddenly into a diapason of brute-sound, grunting, squealing and swine-howling; all formed into a sound that was the essential melody of the brute—a grunting, squealing, howling roar that rose, roar by roar, howl by howl and squeal by squeal to a crescendo of horrors—the bestial growths, longings, zests and acts of some grotto of hell. . . . It is no use, I can't give it you. I get dumb with the failure of my command over speech to tell you what that grunting, howling, roaring melody conveyed to me. It had in it something so inexplicably *below* the horizons of the soul in its monstrousness and fearfulness that the ordinary simple fear of death itself, with all its attendant agonies and terrors and sorrows, seemed like a thought of something peaceful and infinitely holy compared with the fear of those unknown elements in that dreadful roaring melody. And the sound was with me *inside* the room—*there right in the room with me.* Yet I seemed not to be aware of confining walls, but of echoing spaces of gargantuan corridors. Curious! I had in my mind those two words—gargantuan corridors.

As the rolling chaos of swine melody beat itself away on every side, there came booming through it a single grunt, the single recurring grunt of the HOG; for I knew now that I was actually and without any doubt hearing the beat of monstrosity, the HOG.

"In the Sigsand the thing is described something like this: 'Ye Hogge which ye Almighty alone hath power upon. If in sleep or in ye hour of danger ye hear the voice of ye Hogge, cease ye to meddle. For ye Hogge doth be of ye outer Monstrous Ones, nor shall any human come nigh him nor continue meddling when ye hear his voice, for in ye earlier life upon the world did the Hogge have power, and shall again in ye end. And in that ye Hogge had once a power upon ye earth, so doth he crave sore to come again. And dreadful shall be ye harm to ye soul if ye continue to meddle, and to let ye beast come nigh. And I say unto all, 'if ye have brought this dire danger upon ye, have memory of ye cross, for of that sign hath ye Hogge a horror.'

"There's a lot more, but I can't remember it all and that is about the substance of it.

"There was I holding Bains who was all the time howling that dreadful grunt out with the voice of a swine. I wonder I didn't go mad. It was, I believe, the antidote of dazedness produced by the strain which helped me through each moment.

"A minute later, or perhaps five minutes, I had a sudden new sensation, like a warning cutting through my dulled feelings. I turned my head; but there was nothing behind me, and bending over to my left I seemed to be looking down into that black depth which fell away sheer under my left elbow. At that moment the roaring bellow of swine-noise ceased and I seemed to be staring down into miles of black ether at something that hung there—a pallid face floating far down and remote—a great swine face.

"And as I gazed I saw it grow bigger. A seemingly motionless, pallid swine-face rising upward out of the depth. And suddenly I realized that I was actually looking at the Hog."

5

"FOR perhaps a full minute I stared down through the darkness at that thing swimming like some far-off, dead-white planet in that stupendous void. And then I simply woke up bang, as you might say, to the possession of my faculties. For just as a certain over degree of strain had brought about the dumbly helpful anaesthesia of dazedness, so this sudden overwhelming supreme fact of horror produced, in turn, its reaction from inertness to action. I passed in one moment from listlessness to a fierce efficiency.

"I knew that I had, through some accident, penetrated beyond all previous

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'bounds,' and that I stood where no human soul had any right to be, and that in but a few of the puny minutes of earth's time I might be dead.

"Whether Bains had passed beyond the 'line of retraction' or not, I could not tell. I put him down carefully but quickly on his side, between the inner circle—that is, the violet circle and the indigo circle—where he lay grunting slowly. Feeling that the dreadful moment had come I drew out my automatic. It seemed best to make sure of our end before that thing in the depth came any nearer; for once Bains in his present condition came within what I might term the 'inductive forces' of the monster, he would cease to be human. There would happen, as in that case of Aster who stayed outside the pentacles in the Black Veil Case, what can only be described as a pathological, spiritual change—literally in other words, soul destruction.

"And then something seemed to be telling me not to shoot. This sounds perhaps a bit superstitious; but I meant to kill Bains in that moment, and what stopped me was a distinct message from the outside.

"I tell you, it sent a great thrill of hope through me, for I knew that the forces which govern the spinning of the outer circle were intervening. But the very fact of the intervention proved to me afresh the enormous spiritual peril into which we had stumbled; for that inscrutible Protective Force only intervenes between the human *soul* and the Outer Monstrosities.

"The moment I received that message I stood up like a flash and turned towards the pit, stepping over the violet circle slap into the mouth of darkness. I had to take the risk in order to get at the switchboard which lay on the glass shelf under the table top in the center. I could not shake free from the horror of the idea that I might fall down through that awful blackness. The floor felt solid enough under me; but I seemed to be walking on nothing above a black void, like an inverted starless night, with the face of the approaching Hog rising up from far down under my feet—a silent, incredible thing out of the abyss—a pallid, floating swine-face, framed in enormous blackness.

"Two quick, nervous strides took me to the table standing there in the center with its glass legs apparently resting on nothing. I grabbed out the switchboard, sliding out the vulcanite plate which carried the switch-control of the blue circle. The battery which fed this circle was the right hand one of the row of seven, and each battery was marked with the letter of its circle painted on it, so that in an emergency I could select any particular battery in a moment.

"As I snatched up the B switch I had a grim enough warning of the unknown dangers that I was risking in that short journey of two steps; for that dreaful sense of vertigo returned suddenly and for one horrible moment I saw everything through a blurred medium as if I were trying to look through water.

"BELOW me, far away down between my feet I could see the Hog which, in some peculiar way, looked different—clearer and much nearer, and enormous. I felt it had got nearer to me all in a moment. And suddenly I had the impression I was descending bodily.

"I had a sense of a tremendous force being used to push me over the side of that pit, but with every shred of will power I had in me I hurled myself into the smoky appearance that hid everything and reached the violet circle where Bains lay in front of me.

"Here I crouched down on my heels, and with my two arms out before me I slipped the nails of each forefinger under the vulcanite base of the blue circle, which I lifted very gently so that when the base was far enough from the floor I could push the tips of my fingers underneath. I took care to keep from reaching farther under than the inner edge of the glowing tube which rested on the two-inch broad foundation of vulcanite.

"Very slowly I stood upright, lifting the side of the blue circle with me. My feet were between the indigo and the violet circles, and only the blue circle between me and sudden death; for if it had snapped with the unusual strain I was putting upon it by lifting it like that, I knew that I should in all probability go West pretty quickly.

"So you fellows can imagine what I felt like. I was conscious of a disagreeable faint

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prickling that was strongest in the tips of my fingers and wrists, and the blue circle seemed to vibrate strangely as if minute particles of something were impinging upon it in countless millions. Along the shining glass tubes for a couple of feet on each side of my hands a queer haze of tiny sparks boiled and whirled in the form of an extraordinary halo.

"Stepping forward over the indigo circle I pushed the blue circle out against the slowly moving wall of black cloud causing a ripple of tiny pale flashes to curl in over the circle. These flashes ran along the vacuum tube until they came to the place where the blue circle crossed the indigo, and there they flicked off into space with sharp cracks of sound.

"As I advanced slowly and carefully with the blue circle a most extraordinary thing happened, for the moving wall of cloud gave from it in a great belly of shadow, and appeared to thin away from before it. Lowering my edge of the circle to the floor I stepped over Bains and right into the mouth of the pit, lifting the other side of the circle over the table. It creaked as if it were about to break in half as I lifted it, but eventually it came over safely.

"When I looked again into the depth of that shadow I saw below me the dreadful pallid head of the Hog floating in a circle of night. It struck me that it glowed very slightly—just a vague luminosity. And quite near—comparatively. No one could have judged distances in that black void.

"Picking up the edge of the blue circle again as I had done before, I took it out further till it was half clear of the indigo circle. Then I picked up Bains and carried him to that portion of the floor guarded by the part of the blue circle which was clear of the defense. Then I lifted the circle and started to move it forward as quickly as I dared, shivering each time the joints squeaked as the whole fabric of it groaned with the strain I was putting upon it. And all the time the moving wall of tufted clouds gave from the edge of the blue circle, bellying away from it in a marvellous fashion as if blown by an unheard wind.

"From time to time little flashes of light had begun to flick in over the blue circle, and I began to wonder whether it would be able to hold out the 'tension' until I had dragged it clear of the 'defense.'

"Once it was clear I hoped the abnormal stress would cease from about us, and concentrate chiefly around the defense again, and the attractions of the negative 'tension.'

"Just then I heard a sharp tap behind me, and the blue circle jarred somewhat, having now ridden completely over the violet and indigo circles, and dropped clear on the floor. The same instant there came a low rolling noise as of thunder, and a curious roaring. The black circling wall had thinned away from around us and the room showed clearly once more, yet nothing was to be seen except that now and then a peculiar bluish flicker of light would ripple across the floor.

"TURNING to look at the defense I noticed it was surrounded by the circling wall of black cloud, and looked strangely extraordinary seen from the outside. It resembled a slightly swaying squat funnel of whirling black mist reaching from the floor to the ceiling, and through it I could see glowing, sometimes vague and sometimes plain, the indigo and violet circles. And then as I watched, the whole room seemed suddenly filled with an awful presence which pressed upon me with a weight of horror that was the very essence of spiritual deathliness.

"Kneeling there in the blue circle by Bains, my initiative faculties stupefied and temporarily paralyzed, I could form no further plan of escape, and indeed I seemed to care for nothing at the moment. I felt I had already escaped from immediate destruction and I was strung up to an amazing pitch of indifference to any minor horrors.

"Bains all this while had been quietly lying on his side. I rolled him over and looked closely at his eyes, taking care on account of his condition not to gaze *into* them; for if he had passed beyond the 'line of retraction' he would be dangerous. I mean, if the 'wandering' part of his essence had been assimulated by the Hog, then Bains would be spiritually accessible and might be even then no more than the outer form of the man, charged with radiation of the monstrous ego of the Hog, and therefore capable of

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what I might term for want of a more exact phrase, a psychically *infective* force; such force being more readily transmitted through the eyes than any other way, and capable of producing a brainstorm of an extremely dangerous character.

"I found Bains, however, with both eyes with an extraordinary distressed interned quality; not the eyeballs, remember, but a reflex action transmitted from the 'mental eye' to the physical eye, and giving to the physical eye an expression of thought instead of sight. I wonder whether I make this clear to you?

"Abruptly, from every part of the room there broke out the noise of those hoofs again, making the place echo with the sound as if a thousand swine had started suddenly from an absolute immobility into a mad charge. The whole riot of animal sound seemed to heave itself in one wave towards the oddly swaying and circling funnel of black clouds which rose from floor to ceiling around the violet and indigo circles.

"As the sounds ceased I saw something was rising up through the middle of the 'defense.' It rose with a slow steady movement. I saw it pale and huge through the swaying, whirling funnel of cloud—a monstrous pallid snout rising out of that unknowable abyss. . . . It rose higher like a huge pale mound. Through a thinning of the cloud curtain I saw one small eye. . . . I shall never see a pig's eye again without feeling something of what I felt then. A pig's eye with a sort of hell-light of vile understanding shining at the back of it."

6

"AND then suddenly a dreadful terror came over me, for I saw the beginning of the end that I had been dreading all along—I saw through the slow whirl of the cloud curtains that the violet circle had begun to leave the floor. It was being taken up on the spread of the vast snout.

"Straining my eyes to see through the swaying funnel of clouds I saw that the violet circle had melted and was running down the pale sides of the snout in streams of violet colored fire. And as it melted there came a change in the atmosphere of the room. The black funnel shone with a dull gloomy red, and a heavy red glow filled the room.

"The change was such as one might experience if one had been looking through a protective glass at some light and the glass had been suddenly removed. But there was a further change that I realized directly through my feelings. It was as if the horrible presence in the room had come closer to my own soul. I wonder if I am making it at all clear to you. Before, it had oppressed me somewhat as a death on a very gloomy and dreary day beats down upon one's spirit. But now there was a savage menace, and the actual feeling of a foul thing *close up against me*. It was horrible, simply horrible.

"And then Bains moved. For the first time since he went to sleep the rigidity went out of him, and rolling suddenly over on to his stomach he fumbled up in a curious animal-like fashion, on to his hands and feet. Then he charged straight across the blue circle towards the things in the 'defense.'

"With a shriek I jumped to pull him back; but it was not my voice that stopped him. It was the blue circle. It made him give back from it as though some invisible hand had jerked him backwards. He threw up his head like a hog, squealing with the voice of a swine, and started off round the inside of the blue circle. Round and round it he went, twice attempting to bolt across it to the horror in that swaying funnel of cloud. Each time he was thrown back, and each time he squealed like a great swine, the sounds echoing round the room in a horrible fashion as though they came from somewhere a long way off.

"By this time I was fairly sure that Bains had indeed passed the 'line of retraction,' and the knowledge brought a fresh and more hopeless horror and pity to me, and a grimmer fear for myself. I knew that if it were so, it was not Bains I had with me in the circle but a monster, and that for my own last chance of safety I should have to get him outside of the circle.

"He had ceased his tireless running round and round, and now lay on his side grunting continually and softly in a dismal kind of way. As the slowly whirling clouds thinned a little I saw again that pallid face

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with some clearness. It was still rising, but slowly, very slowly, and again a hope grew in me that it might be checked by the 'defense.' Quite plainly I saw that the horror was looking at Bains, and at that moment I saved my own life and soul by looking down. There, close to me on the floor was the thing that looked like Bains, its hands stretched out to grip my ankles. Another second, and I should have been tripped *outwards*. Do you realize what that would have meant?

"It was no time to hesitate. I simply jumped and came down crash with my knees on top of Bains. He lay quiet enough after a short struggle; but I took off my braces and lashed his hands up behind him. And I shivered with the very touch of him, as though I was touching something monstrous.

"By the time I had finished I noticed that the reddish glow in the room had deepened quite considerably, and the whole room was darker. The destruction of the violet circle had reduced the light perceptibly; but the darkness that I am speaking of was something more than that. It seemed as if something new had come into the atmosphere of the room—a sort of gloom, and in spite of the shining of the blue circle and the indigo circle inside the funnel of cloud, there was now more red light than anything else.

"Opposite me the huge, cloud-shrouded monster in the indigo circle appeared to be motionless. I could see its outline vaguely all the time, and only when the cloud funnel thinned could I see it plainly—a vast, snouted mound, faintly and whitely luminous, one gargantuan side turned towards me, and near the base of the slope a minute slit out of which shone one whitish eye.

"PRESENTLY through the thin gloomy red vapor I saw something that killed the hope in me, and gave me a horrible despair; for the indigo circle, the final barrier of the 'defense,' was being slowly lifted into the air—the Hog had begun to rise higher. I could see its dreadful snout rising upwards out of the cloud. Slowly, very slowly, the snout rose up, and the indigo circle went up with it.

"In the dead stillness of that room I got a strange sense that all eternity was tense and utterly still as if certain powers knew of this horror I had brought into the world. . . . And then I had an awaredness of something coming . . . something from far, far away. It was as if some hidden unknown part of my brain knew it. Can you understand? There was somewhere in the heights of space a light that was coming near. I seemed to *hear* it coming. I could just see the body of Bains on the floor, huddled and shapeless and inert. Within the swaying veil of cloud the monster showed as a vast pale, faintly luminous mound, hugely snouted—an infernal hillock of monstrosity, pallid and deadly amid the redness that hung in the atmosphere of the room.

"Something told me that it was making a final effort against the help that was coming. I saw the indigo circle was now some inches from the floor, and every moment I expected to see it flash into streams of indigo fire running down the pale slopes of the snout. I could see the circle beginning to move upward at a perceptible speed. The monster was triumphing.

"Out in some realm of space a low, continuous thunder sounded. The thing in the great heights was coming fast, but it could never come in time. The thunder grew from a low, far mutter into a deep, steady rolling of sound. . . . It grew louder and louder, and as it grew I saw the indigo circle, now shining through the red gloom of the room, was a whole foot off the floor. I thought I saw a faint splutter of indigo light. . . . The final circle of the barrier was beginning to melt.

"That instant the thunder of the thing in flight which my brain heard so plainly, rose into a crashing, world-shaking bellow of speed, making the room rock and vibrate to an immensity of sound. A strange flash of blue flame ripped open the funnel of cloud momentarily from top to base, and I saw for one brief instant the pallid monstrosity of the Hog, stark and pale and dreadful.

"Then the sides of the funnel joined again, hiding the thing from me as the funnel became submerged quickly into a dome of silent blue light—God's own color! All at once it seemed the cloud had gone, and from floor to ceiling of the room, in awful majesty, like a living Presence, there ap-

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peared that dome of blue fire banded with three rings of green light at equal distances. There was no sound or movement, not even a flicker, nor could I see anything in the light; for looking into it was like looking into the cold blue of the skies. But I felt sure that there had come to our aid one of those inscrutable forces which govern the spinning of the outer circle, for the dome of blue light, banded with three green bands of silent fire was the outward or visible sign of an enormous force, undoubtedly of a defensive nature.

"Through ten minutes of absolute silence I stood there in the blue circle watching the phenomenon. Minute by minute I saw the heavy, repellent red driven out of the room as the place lightened quite noticeably. And as it lightened, the body of Bains began to resolve out of a shapeless length of shadow, detail by detail, until I could see the braces with which I had lashed his wrists together.

"And as I looked at him his body moved slightly, and in a weak but perfectly sane voice, he said:

" 'I've had it again! My God! I've had it again!' "

VII

"I KNELT down quickly by his side and loosened the braces from his wrists, helping him to turn over and sit up. He gripped my arm a little crazily with both hands.

" 'I went to sleep after all,' he said. 'And I've been down there again. My God! It nearly had me. I was down in that awful place and it seemed to be just round a great corner, and I was stopped from coming back. I seem to have been fighting for ages and ages. I felt I was going mad. Mad! I've been nearly down into a hell. I could hear you calling down to me from some awful height. I could hear your voice echoing along yellow passages. They *were* yellow. I know they were. And I tried to come and I couldn't.'

" 'Did you see me?' I asked him when he stopped, gasping.

" 'No,' he answered, leaning his head against my shoulder. 'I tell you it nearly got me that time. I shall never dare go to sleep again as long as I live. Why didn't you wake me?'

" 'I did,' I told him. 'I had you in my arms most of the time. You kept looking up into my eyes as if you knew I was there.'

" 'I know,' he said. 'I remember now; but you seemed to be up at the top of a frightful hole, miles and miles up from me, and those horrors were grunting and squealing and howling, and trying to catch me and keep me down there. But I could not see anything—only the yellow walls of those passages. And all the time there was something round the corner.'

" 'Anyway, you're safe enough now,' I told him. 'And I'll guarantee you shall be safe in the future.'

"The room had grown dark save for the light from the blue circle. The dome had disappeared, the whirling funnel of black cloud had gone, the Hog had gone, and the light had died out of the indigo circle. And the atmosphere of the room was safe and normal again as I proved by moving the switch, which was near me, so as to lessen the 'defensive' power of the blue circle and enable me to 'feel' the outside tension. Then I turned to Bains.

" 'Come along,' I said. 'We'll go and get something to eat, and have a rest.'

"But Bains was already sleeping like a tired child, his head pillowed on his hand. 'Poor little devil!' I said as I picked him up in my arms. 'Poor little devil!'

"I walked across to the main switchboard and threw over the current so as to throw the 'V' protective pulse out of the four walls and the door; then I carried Bains out into the sweet wholesome normality of everything. It seemed wonderful, coming out of that chamber of horrors, and it seemed more wonderful still to see my bedroom door opposite, wide open, with the bed looking so soft and white and usual—so ordinary and human. Can you chaps understand?

"I carried Bains into the room and put him on the couch; and then it was I realized how much I'd been up against, for when I was getting myself a drink I dropped the bottle and had to get another.

"After I had made Bains take a drink, I laid him on the bed.

" 'Now,' I said, 'look into my eyes fixedly. Do you hear me? You are going off to sleep safely and soundly, and if anything

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troubles you, obey me and *wake up*. Now, sleep—sleep—sleep!'

"I SWEPT my hands down over his eyes half a dozen times, and he fell over like a child. I knew that if the danger came again he would obey my will and wake up. I intend to cure him, partly by hypnotic suggestion, partly by a certain electrical treatment which I am getting Dr. Witton to give him.

"That night I slept on the couch, and when I went to look at Bains in the morning I found him still sleeping, so leaving him there I went into the test room to examine results. I found them very surprising.

"Inside the room I had a queer feeling, as you can imagine. It was extraordinary to stand there in that curious bluish light from the 'treated' windows, and see the blue circle lying, still glowing, where I had left it; and further on, the 'defense,' lying circle within circle, all 'out'; and in the center the glass-legged table standing where a few hours before it had been submerged in the horrible monstrosity of the Hog. I tell you, it all seemed like a wild and horrible dream as I stood there and looked. I have carried out some curious tests in there before now, as you know, but I've never come nearer to a catastrophe.

"I left the door open so as not to feel shut in, and then I walked over to the 'defense.' I was intensely curious to see what had happened physically under the action of such a force as the Hog. I found unmistakable signs that proved the thing had been indeed a Saaitii manifestation, for there had been no psychic or physical illusion about the melting of the violet circle. There remained nothing of it except a ring of patches of melted glass. The gutta base had been fused entirely, but the floor and everything was intact. You see, the Saaitii forms can often attack and destroy, or even make use of, the very 'defensive' material used against them.

"Stepping over the outer circle and looking closely at the indigo circle I saw that it was melted clean through in several places. Another fraction of time and the Hog would have been free to expand as an invisible mist of horror and destruction into the atmosphere of the world. And then, in that very moment of time, salvation had come. I wonder if you can get my feelings as I stood there staring down at the destroyed barrier."

Carnacki began to knock out his pipe, which is always a sign that he has ended his tale, and is ready to answer any questions we may want to ask.

Taylor was first in. "Why didn't you use the electric pentacle as well as your new spectrum circles?" he asked.

"Because," replied Carnacki, "the pentacle is simply 'defensive' and I wished to have the power to make a 'focus' during the early part of the experiment, and then, at the critical moment, to change the combination of the colors so as to have a 'defense' against the results of the 'focus.' You follow me.

"You see," he went on, seeing we hadn't grasped his meaning, "there can be no 'focus' within a pentacle. It is just of a 'defensive' nature. Even if I had switched the current out of the electric pentacle, I should still have had to contend with the peculiar and undoubtedly 'defensive' power that its form seems to exert, and this would have been sufficient to 'blur' the focus.

"IN THIS new research work I'm doing, I'm bound to use a 'focus' and so the pentacle is barred. But I'm not sure it matters. I'm convinced this new spectrum 'defense' of mine will prove absolutely invulnerable when I've learnt how to use it; but it will take me some time. This last case has taught me something new. I had never thought of combining green with blue; but the three bands of green in the blue of that dome has set me thinking. If only I knew the right combinations! It's the combinations I've got to learn. You'll understand better the importance of these combinations when I remind you that green by itself is, in a very limited way, more deadly than red itself—and red is the danger color of all."

"Tell us, Carnacki," I said, "what is the Hog? Can you? I mean what kind of monstrosity is it? Did you *really* see it, or was it all some horrible, dangerous kind of dream? How do you know it was one of the outer monsters? And what is the difference between that sort of danger and the

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sort of thing you saw in the Gateway of the Monster case? And what . . . ?"

"Steady!" laughed Carnacki. "One at a time! I'll answer all your questions; but I don't think I'll take them quite in your order. For instance, speaking about actually seeing the Hog, I might say that, speaking generally, things seen of a 'ghostly' nature are not seen with the eyes; they are seen with the mental eye which has this psychic quality, not always developed to a useable state, in addition to its 'normal' duty of revealing to the brain what our physical eyes record.

"You will understand that when we see 'ghostly' things it is often the 'mental' eye performing simultaneously the duty of revealing to the brain what the physical eye sees as well as what it sees itself. The two sights blending their functions in such a fashion give us the impression that we are actually seeing through our physical eyes the whole of the 'sight' that is being revealed to the brain.

"In this way we get an impression of seeing with our physical eyes both the material and the immaterial parts of an 'abnormal' scene; for each part being received and revealed to the brain by machinery suitable to the particular purpose appears to have equal value of reality—that is, it appears to be equally material. Do you follow me?"

WE NODDED out assent, and Carnacki continued:

"In the same way, were anything to threaten our psychic body we should have the impression, generally speaking, that it was our physical body that had been threatened, because our psychic sensations and impressions would be superimposed upon our physical, in the same way that our psychic and our physical sight are super-imposed.

"Our sensations would blend in such a way that it would be impossible to differentiate between what we felt physically and what we felt psychically. To explain better what I mean, a man may seem to himself, in a 'ghostly' adventure to fall *actually*. That is, to be falling in a physical sense; but all the while it may be his psychic entity, or being—call it what you will—that is falling. But to his brain there is presented the sensation of falling all together. Do you get me?

"At the same time, please remember that the danger is none the less because it is his psychic body that falls. I am referring to the sensation I had of falling during the time of stepping across the mouth of that pit. My physical body could walk over it easily and feel the floor solid under me; but my psychic body was in very real danger of falling. Indeed, I may be said to have literally *carried* my psychic body over, held within me by the pull of my life-force. You see, to my psychic body the pit was as real and as actual as a coal pit would have been to my physical body. It was merely the pull of my life-force which prevented my psychic body from falling *out* of me, rather like a plummet, down through the everlasting depths in obedience to the giant pull of the monster.

"As you will remember, the pull of the Hog was too great for my life-force to withstand, and, psychically, I began to fall. Immediately on my brain was recorded a sensation identical with that which would have been recorded on it had my actual physical body been falling. It was a mad risk I took, but as you know, I had to take it to get to the switch and the batters. When I had that physical sense of falling and seemed to see the black misty sides of the pit all around me, it was my mental eye recording upon the brain what it was seeing. My psychic body had actually begun to fall and was really below the edge of the pit but still in contact with me. In other words, my physical magnetic and psychic 'haloes' were still mingled. My physical body was still standing firmly upon the floor of the room, but if I had not each time by an effort of will forced my physical body across to the side, my psychic body would have fallen completely out of 'contact' with me, and gone like some ghostly meteorite, obedient to the pull of the Hog.

"The curious sensation I had of forcing myself through an obstructing medium was not a physical sensation at all, as we understand that word, but rather the psychic sensation of forcing my entity to re-cross the 'gap' that had already formed between my falling psychic body now below the edge of the pit and my physical body standing on the floor of the room. And that 'gap' was full of a force that strove to prevent

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my body and soul from re-joining. It was a terrible experience. Do you remember how I could still see with my brain through the eyes of my psychic body, though it had already fallen some distance out of me? That is an extraordinary thing to remember.

"However, to get ahead, all 'ghostly' phenomena are extremely diffuse in a normal state. They become actively physically dangerous in all cases where they are concentrated. The best off-hand illustration I can think of is the all-familiar electricity—a force which, by the way, we are too prone to imagine we understand because we've named and harnessed it, to use a popular phrase. But we don't understand it at all! It is still a complete fundamental mystery. Well, electricity when diffused is an 'imagined and unpictured something,' but when concentrated it is sudden death. Have you got me in that?

"Take, for instance, that explanation as a very, very crude sort of illustration of what the Hog is. The Hog is one of those million-million mile-long clouds of 'nebulosity' lying in the Outer Circle. It is because of this that I term those clouds of force the Outer Monsters.

"What they are exactly is a tremendous question to answer. I sometimes wonder whether Dodgson there realizes just how impossible it is to answer some of his questions," and Carnacki laughed.

"But to make a brief attempt at it. There is around this planet, and presumably others, of course, circles of what I might call 'emanations.' This is an extremely light gas, or shall I say ether. Poor ether, it's been hard-worked in its time!

"GO BACK one moment to your school days, and bear in mind that at one time the earth was just a sphere of extremely hot gases. These gases condensed in the form of materials and other 'solid' matters; but there are some that are not yet solidified—air, for instance. Well, we have an earth-sphere of solid matter on which to stamp as solidly as we like; and round about that sphere there lies a ring of gases the constituents of which enter largely into all life, as we understand life—that is, air.

"But this is not the only circle of gas which is floating round us. There are, as I have been forced to conclude, larger and more attenuated 'gas' belts lying, zone on zone, far up and around us. These compose what I have called the inner circle. They are surrounded in their turn by a circle or belt of what I have called, for want of a better word, 'emanations.'

"This circle which I have named the Outer Circle cannot lie less than a hundred thousand miles off the earth, and has a thickness which I have presumed to be anything between five and ten million miles. I believe, but I cannot prove, that it does not spin with the earth but in the opposite direction, for which a plausible cause might be found in the study of the theory upon which a certain electrical machine is constructed.

"I have reason to believe that the spinning of this, the Outer Circle, is disturbed from time to time through causes which are quite unknown to me, but which I believe are based in physical phenomena. Now, the Outer Circle is the psychic circle, yet it is also physical. To illustrate what I mean I must again instance electricity, and say that just as electricity discovered itself to us as something quite different from any of our previous conceptions of matter, so is the psychic, or Outer Circle different from any of our previous conceptions of matter. Yet it is none the less physical in its origin, and in the sense that electricity is physical, the Outer or Psychic Circle is physical in its constituents. Speaking pictorially, it is, physically, to the Inner Circle what the Inner Circle is to the upper stratas of the air, and what the air—as we know that intimate gas—is to the waters and the waters to the solid world. You get my line of suggestion?"

We all nodded, and Carnacki resumed.

"Well, now let me apply all this to what I am leading up to. I suggest that these million-mile-long clouds of monstrosity which float in the psychic, or Outer Circle, are bred of the elements of that circle. They are tremendous psychic forces, bred out of its elements just as an octopus or shark is bred out of the sea, or a tiger or any other physical force is bred out of the elements of its earth-and-air surroundings.

"To go further, a physical man is composed entirely from the constituents of earth and air, by which terms I include sunlight

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and water and 'condiments'! In other words without earth and air he could not *BE!* Or to put it another way, earth and air breed within themselves the materials of the body and the brain, and therefore, presumably, the machine of intelligence.

"NOW apply this line of thought to the psychic, or Outer Circle which though so attenuated that I may crudely presume it to be approximate to our conception of æther, yet contains all the elements for the production of certain phases of force and intelligence. But these elements are in a form as little like matter as the emanations of scent are like the scent itself. Equally, the force-and-intelligence-producing capacity of the Outer Circle no more approximates to the life-and-intelligence-producing capacity of the earth and air than the results of the Outer Circle constituents resemble the results of earth and air. I wonder whether I make it clear.

"And so it seems to me we have the conception of a huge psychic world, bred out of the physical, lying far outside of this world and completely encompassing it, except for the doorways about which I hope to tell you some other evening. This enormous psychic world of the Outer Circle 'breed' if I may use the term, its own psychic forces and intelligences, monstrous and otherwise, just as this world produces its own physical forces and intelligences—beings, animals, insects, etc., monstrous and otherwise.

"The monstrosities of the Outer Circle are malignant towards all that we consider most desirable, just in the same way a shark or a tiger may be considered malignant, in a physical way, to all that we consider desirable. They are predatory—as all positive force is predatory. They have desires regarding us which are incredibly more dreadful to our minds when comprehended than an intelligent sheep would consider our desires towards its own carcass. They plunder and destroy to satisfy lusts and hungers exactly as other forms of existence plunder and destroy to satisfy their lusts and hungers. And the desires of these monsters is chiefly, if not always, for the psychic entity of the human.

"But that's as much as I can tell you tonight. Some evening I want to tell you about the tremendous mystery of the Psychic Doorways. In the meantime, have I made things a bit clearer to you, Dodgson?"

"Yes, and no," I answered. "You've been a brick to make the attempt, but there are still about ten thousand other things I want to know."

Carnacki stood up. "Out you go!" he said using the recognized formula in friendly fashion. "Out you go! I want a sleep."

And shaking him by the hand we strolled out on to the quiet Embankment.

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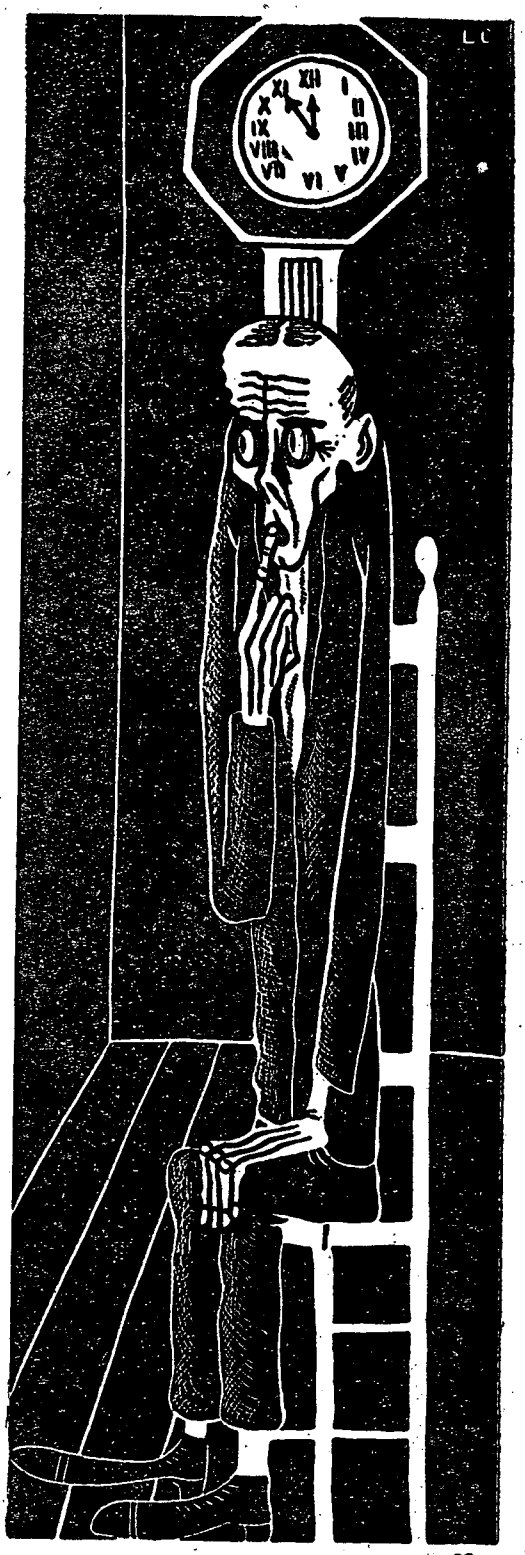
The Final Hour

By CHESTER S. GEIER



THE clock on the fireplace mantel began to strike eleven, softly, as if regretful of the necessity for doing so. Professor Edward Crendon's long, thin fingers stilled in their dance over the keys of the portable, and for a moment the other sounds which filled the dim book-lined study faded into the background as he listened to the chiming of the clock.

. . . five, six, seven, eight . . .

One more hour, Crendon thought with a spasm of dread. Just one more hour to live.

. . . nine, ten, eleven.

Sweet as a breath of old melody, the last note of the chimes faded. Once again dominated the fitful crackling of the smouldering logs in the fireplace and the murmuring patter of the rain which fell in the night, outside.

Crendon remained motionless a moment longer, frozen in the act of typing, gazing fixedly on the clock. Then slowly he relaxed, as if the influence of the chimes were only now leaving him. His hands slid from the keys of the typewriter to the edge of the desk on which it stood. He slumped back in his chair, his long gaunt face bitter with the knowledge of his approaching end.

He didn't want to go. There was still so much to live for. It wasn't fair that existence should end now, like a flower out before full bloom, like a song broken off in mid-chorus. Rebellion stirred dully within him.

How much of his feelings were inspired by fear, Crendon dared not guess. He knew his end wouldn't be one in the literal sense. It would be only the end of the beginning. The curtain would rise on an-

A soul set in type, run off the presses into glorious immortality. . . .

Heading by LEE BROWN COYE

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other scene. A new life would begin, compared to which his present existence would be a moment's glimpse of paradise.

A convulsive shudder swept Crendon's spare form. An eternal sojourn in Hell was not a pleasant thing to look forward to.

With an effort of will, he rallied his waning courage. He had to face the inevitable. A bargain had been made. It would have to be kept.

After all, he realized, so many things would have remained forever impossible if he hadn't made the compact with Satan. Incurably ill, he could never have finished his book. There had been a mortgage on the house. There had been doctor's bills, and more still to come with Ellen about to give birth to Dick, the second and youngest of the two children.

It had all at the time looked so hopeless. Satan's offer had been the only way out. Crendon thought wryly of how eagerly he had accepted. He glanced at the scar on his wrist, source of the blood in which he had signed to the terms of the exchange.

The price had been high, but he had been freed from the shackles of his illness. He had been able to continue with his book. The publishers had made generous advances. All the bills had been paid. There was now a comfortable sum in the bank, and in addition Ellen and the two children would always be well provided for by future royalties from his book. He wouldn't have to worry about them.

He had no regrets except where he himself was concerned. The seven years which he had been granted were almost over. At twelve, Satan would come for payment—Crendon's soul.

On the mantel, the clock ticked away the seconds incessantly, inexorably. The rain pattered against the study windows like watery fingers tapping for admittance. In the fireplace, the glowing logs sputtered fretfully.

CRENDON stirred with returning purpose. There was still much to do. The closing chapter of the last volume of his book had yet to be finished. He thought with satisfaction of what had already been done. The book, a study in six volumes on the evolution of literary expression from earliest recorded times to the present, was going to be a fine thing to leave behind. It ought to be. He had worked hard on it, giving it everything he had.

He rose from the desk and went to the fireplace. With a poker, he prodded the logs back into flaming activity. As he straightened to return to his typewriter, a knock sounded at the door.

It was Ellen, bearing a tray upon which were a pot of black coffee and a cup and saucer. She placed her burden on the desk and turned to smile at Crendon.

"I thought a little coffee would help, since you're staying up so late."

Crendon smiled back at her. Tenderness and longing swept him like a pain.

"I could use some coffee," he said, striving to keep his voice casual. He held her tightly a moment, then turned her gently toward the door. "Now go to bed, Ellen, and don't worry about me. I've stayed up late before."

She laughed guiltily. "I have been worried, but not about you staying up late. You've been acting so strangely the past few days. Tell me, is there anything wrong?"

"How could there be? I'm just excited, I guess, about finishing my book."

"But the way you've been driving yourself. You haven't been eating enough, and you've lost so much weight. Just look at you. All bones. It's as though you've been putting yourself into your work ounce by ounce."

"I'm just in a hurry to be through. It's nothing to worry about."

"Well, I'll be glad when you're done. It will be a relief after more than seven years of seeing you slave over that book of yours." Ellen's voice became eager. "We'll take that trip I've always been talking about. You need a rest."

Crendon nodded. "Guess I do."

"And we'll take the children."

"Of course. The kids will enjoy it immensely. How are they, Ellen? Sleeping?"

"Like logs. That's what I'm going to be doing in a few minutes. Good-night."

"Good-night, Ellen." Only he knew it was good-bye. He watched achingly as she went to the door, knowing he would never see her again. He had an overwhelming desire to call her back, to have her spend

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a few more of these last minutes with him, but he realized despairingly that could not be. There was still that last chapter to do. He could only watch mutely as her slender form, girlish in a long green robe, moved forever beyond recall.

The door closed softly. Crendon was alone. He glanced in sudden apprehension at the clock. It was 11:15.

He hurried back to his desk. He poured a cup of coffee, lighted his pipe, and feverishly resumed work.

THE ticking of the clock, the tapping of the rain, the crackling of the logs, all faded beyond notice. There was just that last chapter, just his fingers flying over the keys. The words came to him more easily than they had ever done. Everything he had to say seemed to be there inside him, vibrant and alive, impatient for expression. The sentences seemed to leap from his dancing fingertips to their birth on paper. Crendon wrote as he had never written before.

Finally Crendon sat back, exhausted but content. It was done. And somehow, in spite of what lay ahead, he felt a deep happiness. Though life as he knew it now would soon be over, a part of himself would continue to live on. He could not wish for a better memorial.

Crendon looked at the clock. Five minutes before twelve. He gathered together the pages of his last manuscript and laid them in a neat pile on one corner of the desk, placing a weight over them so that no chance breeze would blow them away. He tidied his desk a little, sliding its clutter of notes, notebooks, and pencils into various drawers. Then he refilled and lighted his pipe and sat back to wait.

He felt no terror at what was shortly to take place. It was as though in the fire of his final creative labors he had purged himself of fear. His being seemed pervaded by a great calm.

On the mantel, the clock ticked busily, a metal heart pumping the blood of seconds through the arteries of time. It was raining more heavily. Occasional flashes of lightning brightened the dark streaming rectangle of the study windows. The logs in the fireplace were reduced to a few glowing embers, sullen amid the desolation of gray-white ashes.

The clock began to strike twelve. Crendon put aside his pipe and straightened.

From outside there came an unusually large flash of lightning, followed by a great roll of thunder. It seemed to Crendon almost like a signal. He felt what might have been a cold wind sweep through the room. The fire on the hearth leaped in sudden brightness.

A soft knock sounded at the door.

"Come in," Crendon said quietly.

Satan strode briskly into the study, flicking rain from his trench coat with a sodden brown hat. He stopped before the desk and looked down at Crendon. He nodded gravely.

"Your contract has expired, Edward Crendon, and you are now expected to fulfill its terms."

Crendon moved his head in reluctant acknowledgment. He was careful to keep his gaze on Satan's conservative red tie, showing above the V made by the rain-spattered lapels of tan gabardine. He'd already had one glimpse of Satan's eyes and didn't relish another. Except for his terrible eyes, Satan might have been any slight dark man on a mission in the rain.

Crendon said, "It is useless, of course, to ask for a little more time?"

"Quite useless. According to our contract, Edward Crendon, you are to surrender to me your soul promptly at midnight—and not a moment longer."

"Of course," Crendon said. He smiled humorlessly. "I suppose you often receive such requests from those . . . from those who are to—go."

"Quite often."

"It's understandable, no doubt. It isn't easy for a debtor to give up the first real happiness he has ever known for eternal imprisonment in Hell."

"Imprisonment?" Satan laughed softly. "You choose a mild term, Edward Crendon. I assure you there will be more to your sojurn in my domain than mere imprisonment."

"Torment?" Crendon lifted his spare shoulders. "If that's the price, I have nothing to regret. My wife and children are well provided for. My book is finished.

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You will pardon me, I'm sure, if I say it's a good book. I gave it everything I had. I poured my heart and soul into it."

"Your soul?" Satan echoed in sudden sharpness. Then he gave a low chuckle and relaxed. "You are speaking figuratively, of course, not literally."

Crendon turned his eyes to the clock. It was almost through striking the hour. He had been listening to it more or less subconsciously all the time.

. . . *ten, eleven, twelve.*

WITH an abrupt tigerish movement, Satan leaned over the desk, and his awful eyes blazed down into Crendon's. His voice sounded in a harsh whisper of command.

"Come, Edward Crendon, come to me!"

There was eagerness on Satan's face, confidence, anticipated triumph. Then in a flash all vanished to be replaced by a vast dismay. In another whirl of movement, Satan leaped back from the desk. His terrible eyes stared in raging perplexity.

"Where is the rest of it?" Satan snarled. "Speak, Edward Crendon, where is the rest of it? Have you tricked me?"

"Wh-what. . . . ?"

"Your soul! It is not all there. I've got to have all of it."

Remnants of a horrible black fog cleared from before Crendon's eyes. Understanding of what was wrong slowly came to him. He laughed in exultation.

"You want the rest of my soul?" Crendon pointed abruptly at the thick manuscript lying on one corner of the desk. "It is there. I wasn't speaking figuratively after all, it seems, but literally, when I told you I'd poured my heart and soul into my book."

Frustration twisted Satan's face in a burst of supreme fury. "Paper and type do not obey my will. The missing part of you is forever beyond my reach. And I must have all of you—or nothing."

"Then it must be nothing," Crendon said. "This manuscript is the last of six volumes. My publishers have already given me advances on the other five. The money has already been spent, and so that part—the largest and most important part—is beyond my reach also. You can't have me, Satan. I have been bought and paid for under another contract—one you can't hope to break. I have been set in type and run off the presses, locked away safely in five volumes, each running into thousands of copies. The essential part of me lies beyond danger, in a vault of print on paper, which has neither lock nor keys."

Satan had grown calm, though traces of chagrin still lingered on his face. He moved his slight shoulders in a shrug.

"It is not often that I lose out on a contract, Edward Crendon. When I do, however, I concede defeat gracefully." Satan reached into a pocket of his suit and produced a square of folded paper. He looked at it, and it blazed suddenly in his hand. He dropped the ashes into the fireplace.

"The contract is no more, Edward Crendon. You are free, and all that you have gained is yours to keep." With a nod of grave farewell, Satan replaced his hat and walked to the door. It closed softly behind him.

Crendon remained quietly seated, contemplating a great discovery. In all great creations, he reflected, men put a part of themselves. It was because of this that some books and paintings lived on, while all others were forgotten. It was because of this that famous works possessed the quality called genius. To do his best, a man must give generously of himself, a portion of his heart and a large piece of his soul.

The clock ticked in its place on the mantel.

The fire in the hearth had died. Outside, the rain had stopped. The Moon hung bright in a star-flecked sky.

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The Extra Passenger

BY STEPHEN GRENDON

Like all good murder plans, this was almost absurdly simple.

MR. ARODIAS had worked a long time on his plan to kill his eccentric uncle, and he was very proud of it. But then, Mr. Arodias was a very clever man; he had lived by his wits for so many years that it had never been necessary for him to kill Uncle Thaddeus before. Only, now that Mr. Arodias was getting along toward middle age, and his fingers were no longer so nimble as they had once been, the time came. He began by thinking that he ought not to be deprived of his inheritance any longer, and ended up by working out the perfect crime which he defied Scotland Yard to solve.

Like all such plans, it was almost absurdly

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

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simple, and Mr. Arodias indulged in many a self-congratulatory chuckle when he contemplated the bumbling efforts of the C. I. D. to solve it. Uncle Thaddeus, who was a recluse, lived on the edge of Sudbury, which was on the Aberdeen line from London. Three squares from his tree-girt house lived another solitary who owned a fast car and kept it carelessly in an unlocked shed some distance from his house. Sixty miles from Sudbury, where the night train to Aberdeen stopped, lay the hamlet of East Chelmly, the next stop, rather in a curving line from Sudbury, so that it was farther by rail than by highway. It would be a simple matter to take off for Aberdeen from London on the slow night train, slip out of his compartment at Sudbury, "take care" of Uncle Thaddeus, then appropriate his neighbor's fast car, and arrive in East Chelmly in adequate time to slip back on to his train, with none the wiser. A perfect alibi! Ah, what chuckle-heads he would make of the laddies from the Yard!

Moreover, it worked like a charm. True, the old man had recognized him and had muttered something about coming after him before the light in his crafty eyes went out and his battered head fell forward—but it was just a matter of moments; the whole thing had been rehearsed in Mr. Arodias' mind so often that he knew just what to do, and flattered himself by thinking that he could have done it blindfolded. The old dodderer nearby had left his car plentifully supplied with petrol, too, as if he had been an accomplice, and it took Mr. Arodias to East Chelmly in the dead of night, never meeting anyone on the long road, never seeing anyone in the little hamlets through which he passed. He arrived in East Chelmly in excellent time, and like a shadow he slipped around to the station and into his compartment with no one seeing.

No one, that is, except the extra passenger.

For at this point in his perfect crime, Mr. Arodias came face to face with a factor for which he had made no provision. He had left his compartment empty, save for his bags and golf-clubs; he came back to it to find huddled in the opposite seat, with his hat well down over his face, an extra passenger. It was possible that the fellow had not marked Mr. Arodias' entrance, but, much to his annoyance, Mr. Arodias could not be sure.

"Sorry to disturb you," he said genially. "I have been in the lavatory."

No answer.

Mr. Arodias hawked once or twice.

No sign of life.

Mr. Arodias settled back, relieved, feeling very comfortable and secure. This pleasant feeling of security did not last, however. In a few moments he was asking himself where in the devil the extra passenger had come from? There had been no stop between Sudbury and East Chelmly. The compartment was in one of the through coaches, not a local. It was barely possible that a passenger from one of the other compartments had mistaken Mr. Arodias' for his own in the dark, and now occupied it by mistake. For it was still dark, being somewhat past midnight, and the lights in the corridor were dim.

But this explanation did not satisfy Mr. Arodias, and he was possessed of a normal dislike of unsatisfactory matters. This was all the more true when the matter in question represented a potential flaw in what he felt was a very perfect plan. His fellow-traveler, however, was apparently oblivious of his growing perturbation; he continued to huddle there without movement other than that of the train rushing through the night. This troubled Mr. Arodias; he expected nothing less than a full account explaining the extra passenger's presence.

FAILING this, he began to imagine all kinds of things, and he took every opportunity to examine his companion in the light of passing stations. He wore heavy, almost loutish shoes. Obviously a countryman. His hands, which did not seem clean, were those of an old man. His hat had seen much roughing. Of his face, Mr. Arodias saw nothing. How long, he wondered, had he been sleeping? If he had just simply blundered into the compartment and settled down and dozed right off, all would be well. But if he had not done so, he might well be in a position to ask annoying questions about what kept Mr. Arodias in the lavatory for time enough to enable the train to put close

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to sixty or seventy miles behind from the time he had entered the lavatory—which was, of course, presumably at the same hour the extra passenger had entered Mr. Arodias' compartment.

This thought needled Mr. Arodias with desperation. Already he had visions of some officious bumpkin plodding to the police station in Aberdeen and solemnly deposing that Mr. Arodias' late entrance was a suspicious circumstance. He could see it in cold print. *"Sudbury Victim's Heir Questioned,"* the headline would read. And this unwelcome stranger, huddled there like a tangible threat to his security, would have put all his suspicions down. " 'E come late into 'is seat, an' I could na' 'elp wonderin' where the zur kep' 'imself all that time. A good hour, 't was. Nor did 'e 'ave the look of a sick man about 'im."

Mr. Arodias could hardly contain himself. He coughed loudly. Fancying that he saw a movement about his fellow traveler not inspired by the train, he said hastily, "Forgive me. I didn't mean to awaken you."

But there was no answer.

Mr. Arodias bit his lip. "I say," he said firmly.

Silence.

The sounds of the train filled the compartment—the whistle up ahead, the rush of steam, the clicking of the drivers—filled the room and rolled around in it, swelling and growing. It was grotesque. It made such a sound that it would have awakened the dead, thought Mr. Arodias. Yet the extra passenger slept calmly through it, huddled there like someone lost in the deepest dream.

He leaned forward and tapped the fellow on the knee.

"Look here, this is my compartment, you know."

No answer.

Oh, it was maddening! Especially so for a man of Mr. Arodias' temperament, and most particularly since this was happening just after he had brought off what was certain to come out in the end as his most successful coup in a career of successes. This confounded extra passenger, by his very presence, however innocuous he might be, was taking the edge of enjoyment off his pleasure in his accomplishment of that night.

Mr. Arodias considered shaking the fellow.

But this he dismissed from his mind within a few moments. There was, after all, no good in antagonizing him. There was no reason to believe that he had seen a single thing which might make him suspicious. Indeed, he might leave the compartment at any place along the line without once realizing that he sat in the same train with the heir to the Sudbury recluse. No, there was absolutely no good in unnecessarily attracting attention to himself.

He felt frustrated, and he redoubled his efforts to examine his fellow traveler. He took the trouble, finally, to take out his pipe, fill it, and strike a match, rather more for the purpose of examining the extra passenger in its flickering light than for that of lighting his pipe. Then for the first time he observed that the fellow had no baggage of any kind. Manifestly then, he had stumbled into the wrong compartment. The shoes were country shoes, all right. Clod-hopperish. Mud on them, too. And on his hands. Uncouth fellow.

Or was it mud? The match went out.

MR. ARODIAS was afraid to light another. For one cataclysmic moment, the stuff on his fellow traveler's hands and shoes had looked like blood! Mr. Arodias swallowed and told himself that he was having hallucinations stemming from some rudimentary conscience which had not died with the rest of it in that long ago time when he had entered upon his life of dubious practices and crime.

He sat for a long moment in silence. The hour was now past two in the morning. He busied himself for a little while peering out of the window, trying to ascertain just where the train was at the moment. Approaching the Scottish border, he decided. He closed his eyes and tried to think how he must act when they found him in Aberdeen and told him his Uncle Thaddeus was dead, slain by an unknown assailant in the night, while he was on his way to Scotland under the protection of such a perfect alibi. But there was nothing to be gained in thinking about this; he had decided upon his course of action right up to the moment he actually took possession of his inheritance—he had decided

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upon that long ago; it was all an integral part of his plan. Indeed, the only incident which was not integral to his plan was this extra passenger.

He turned to him again, hawked once more, coughed loudly, knocked his pipe out on the window-sill, and looked hopefully over through the darkness of the compartment at that huddled old fellow in the corner of his seat.

No movement.

"This has gone far enough," he said aloud, becoming vexed.

Silence.

He leaned over once more and tapped his companion on the knee, with some persistence. "Look here, you're in the wrong compartment, sir."

This time he got an answer. It was a muttered, sleepy, "No."

The voice was guttural, broken. Mr. Arodias was slightly disconcerted, but in one way relieved.

"I'm sorry," he said, in a more pleasant tone, "but I believe you got into my compartment by mistake."

"No," said his companion again.

Instantly annoyed once more, Mr. Arodias wondered why the fellow insisted on talking from beneath his hat.

"Where did you get on the train?" he asked with some asperity.

"In Sudbury."

Sudbury! Of course! That could have been. Why had he not thought of that? He had been in such a hurry to get off the train he had not thought that someone might get on. He was about to speak again when his companion added a catastrophic afterthought.

"Where you got off," he said.

AFTER but a moment of cold shock, Mr. Arodias rallied. "Yes, I stepped out for a breath of air, and then went to the lavatory when I got back."

"I thought," the old man went on with a burr of dialect in his voice, just as Mr. Arodias had imagined, "you might have gone to see your uncle."

Mr. Arodias sat quite still. Faced with this challenge, his mind worked with the speed of lightning. Within ten seconds Mr. Arodias decided that, whoever he was, the extra passenger must never leave the night train alive. He might know nothing at all of the crime, but he nevertheless knew enough to hang Mr. Arodias. He knew enough, indeed; he knew Mr. Arodias, he knew he had got off at Sudbury, and no doubt he knew he had reappeared in his compartment in the vicinity of East Chelmly. That was enough to doom one of them, and Mr. Arodias, having got this far, had no intention of being doomed.

MR. ARODIAS needed time, and he was now quite willing to spar for it until he had evolved some plan for eliminating this menacing old fellow and dumping his body somewhere along the right-of-way.

"You know my uncle?" he asked in a strained voice.

"Ay, quite well."

"I don't know him too well myself. I'm a Londoner, and he keeps to his own place in the country."

"Ay. He has reasons, you might say."

Mr. Arodias pricked up his ears. "What reasons?" he asked bluntly.

"A pity you don't know."

"I don't," said Mr. Arodias, irritated.

"A pity you didn't know a bit more."

"If there's something about my uncle I ought to know, I would like to hear it."

"Ay, you shall. Your uncle's a mage."

"A mage?" Mr. Arodias was mystified.

"A warlock, then, if you like that better."

Mr. Arodias was amazed. He was also touched with a kind of macabre amusement. He did not know why the fact that the old man's fellow villagers regarded him as a warlock should amuse him; yet it did. Even in his amusement he did not lose sight of his decision that this prying oldster must die, and he was contemplating whether he should dispatch him with a quick blow or two or whether he should stifle his outcries and strangle him. The important thing, of course, was to prevent the guard from hearing anything suspicious. Meanwhile, he must carry on. Best to humor the extra passenger.

"Warlock, eh? And no doubt he had some special talents?" He caught himself just in time to prevent his saying "had"; it would never do to refer to Uncle Thaddeus in the past tense—just in case something

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went wrong and his curious fellow-traveler got away after all.

"Ay, that he had."

"Foretold the weather, no doubt."

"That any gibbering fool could do."

"Told fortunes, then?"

"A gypsy's trade! Not he! But then, you always did underrate him."

"Did I, now?"

"Ay."

"What was so wonderful about his being a warlock—if he was."

"Oh, he was. Never a doubt about that. He had his familiar, too—on wings."

"Wings?"

"Ay. He brought me to the train."

Mr. Arodias looked askance. A kind of premonitory tingle crept up his spine. He blinked and wished the light were a little stronger. There was beginning to be something uncomfortably challenging about his chosen victim; Mr. Arodias did not like it.

"And he could send about a lich or two, if he had a mind to."

"A lich?" said Mr. Arodias in a dry voice. "What the devil's that?"

"You don't know?"

"I wouldn't ask you if I did."

"It's a corpse, that's what."

"Send it about? What are you talking about?" demanded Mr. Arodias, feeling a chill along his arms.

"Ay—for a special purpose. Oh, your uncle was a great one for things like that."

"Special purpose," repeated Mr. Arodias, and at that moment his foot touched upon a sturdy weight which had the feel of a sash-weight, and he bent to take it in his hand.

"A special purpose," said the extra passenger. "Like this one."

Mr. Arodias was suddenly aware that his traveling companion had been speaking of his uncle for the past few minutes in the past tense. A kind of constriction seized upon his throat; but his fingers tightened upon the weight in his hand. The extra passenger knew or guessed far too much; whatever the risk, he must die now—quickly. He leaned forward, stealthily, as if he thought that the old fellow could see him despite the darkness and the hat over his face.

Then he snatched the hat away, and aimed his first blow.

It did not fall.

THE head under that was hardly half a head—smashed in, and with the blood run down all over the face—the head of his Uncle Thaddeus! A scream rose and died in Mr. Arodias' throat.

The eyes in that battered head were looking at him, and they were shining as if lit by the fires of hell.

No word, no sound passed Mr. Arodias' lips; he was incapable of speech, of movement. A power, a force beyond Mr. Arodias' comprehension emanated from the thing on the seat opposite. The eyes held him, the eyes encompassed him, the eyes drew him. Mr. Arodias shrank together and slipped from the seat to his knees on the floor of the compartment. As in a dream he heard the sounds of the train, coming as if from very far away.

"Come to me, Simon," said the thing that had been his Uncle Thaddeus.

And Simon Arodias crept across the floor and groveled.

"Bring your face closer, Simon."

And Simon Arodias raised his head, with a harsh whimpering sound struggling for utterance in his throat. Powerless to move, he watched one of the thick bloody hands of the extra passenger come down like a vise upon his face. Then he saw nothing more.

THE guard who found Mr. Arodias collapsed from shock.

The medical examiner at Aberdeen was upset for a week. Nevertheless, despite the condition of Mr. Arodias' face—what was left of it—it was ascertained that he had been suffocated—"by person or persons unknown. Circumstances notwithstanding, Mr. Arodias could not have committed suicide.

As for those fumbling chuckle-heads at Scotland Yard—they had already found the gloves which Mr. Arodias had discarded on his way from the stolen car abandoned in East Chelmly to the station, the gloves which were to lead them all in good time to the little plot of ground where Mr. Arodias was enjoying, not his Uncle Thaddeus' money, but his own just due.

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The King of Shadows

"No sword or gun can avail against what lies within these peaks."

JOHN FALLON knew that he was going to have trouble with his Kirghiz guides, when he saw the little leather drums they had beside them as they sat around the campfire.

Shaman drums, those! And that meant that the four Kirghiz were afraid—afraid of something that wasn't human.

"I should have known it," Fallon muttered to himself. "They've been getting jumpier every mile nearer the mountains."

The mountains loomed northward, a black, giant barrier shouldering the stars. They were an unexplored spur of the Kunlun Range that sprawled half a thousand miles across this high, lonely roof of the world where Tibet, India and China met.

The moon was rising, and from its direction blew a keenly chill wind that grabbled at the little campfire and then screeched on eerily through the narrow pass that split the range. Fallon had wanted to camp inside that pass, but the Kirghiz had demurred.

The hobbled pack-ponies stirred nervously as Fallon strode toward the fire. In the shifting red light, the flat, swart faces of the four natives looked up sullenly from under their sheepskin caps.

Fallon spoke casually in the Altaic language he had learned during his weeks of search.

"We had better sleep now. We'll want to start early through that pass tomorrow."

The four swart faces darkened. Then Mursul, the wrinkled, wizened oldest of the Kirghiz, spoke for them.

"Fallon-khan, we cannot go there! The land inside those mountains is forbidden, accursed! The lair of Erlik!"

As he pronounced that supremely dreaded name, old Mursul made a curious, swift gesture drawn from the antiquity of shaman religion. The other Kirghiz hastily repeated the sign.

Fallon kept his voice even. "Listen, I hired you in Khotan for this job. I told you that I was hunting for a man, and that I would hunt until I found him. And we haven't found him yet.

"His plane fell in this region—I know that from the direction of his last radio call. We've narrowed it down to this particular sector, and he's got to be here."

"Dead," muttered one of the younger Kirghiz. "You said it was a year ago. The man would be dead, by now."

"Or worse, if he fell in forbidden Santahar!" added old Mursul.

"He isn't dead to me till I find his body," Fallon said grimly. "Rick Carnaby was my friend. We flew from India to China together for two war years. When the war ended I swore I'd come back here and find him, and I'm going to. And you're going to help me."

Mursul stood up, a shapeless figure in his sheepskins, his withered face earnest in the firelight.

"Fallon-khan, you think us frightened children. It is not so! I have ridden from the Altai snows to the sands of the Kizil Kum, in my time! These old hands have killed Mongols!

"But we know that no sword or gun can avail against what lies within these peaks. In there dwell they who lived before the world—the Lord of Shadows and his ghostly people. Dark Erlik, who is older than the Earth!"

Fallon felt the impact of the other's fanaticism. He began to realize the hopelessness of combating it.

HE REMEMBERED now what Martilette, the old French missionary up in Khotan, had told him of the ancient shaman

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beliefs of all these Central Asian peoples.

"They don't worship any gods," Martilette had said. "They think the gods are too far away to bother about us. But they say that the great rebel against the gods, the lord of evil whose name is Erlik, is right here on Earth.

"Erlik is a type—perhaps a prototype—of Lucifer the rebel angel, of Satan, of Ahriman. But to them he's real. They call him the King of Shadows and say that he and his weird brood still dwell in a hidden mountain fastness called Santahar."

Fallon, looking down at the half-sullen, half-scared swart faces in the firelight, made one last attempt to conquer that superstition.

"Let it be so, then," he sneered. "I will go through the pass to search while you wait outside. That will make a pretty tale for the girls of Khotan—that four Men of the Sword were afraid of—shadows!"

He laughed scornfully. "'*Tokta, shungru!*' they'll call when you ride back through the Silver Gate. 'Run, sheepmen!'"

The youngest of the Kirghiz leaped to his feet, eyes glittering passion as his hand went instinctively to his yataghan hilt.

"*I* fear neither man nor demon!" he spat. "No one will ever call me—"

He broke off. His eyes, looking beyond Fallon, lost all their fiery passion and suddenly dilated.

"*Hala an Erlik!*" he yelled hoarsely, and wildly pointed.

Fallon spun around, and was momentarily frozen by an inexplicable sight.

A vertical scimitar of milky light clove the moonlit heavens above the shadowy, looming range. It wavered, twitched, like the beam of a colossal aurora streaming up the sky.

But this was no aurora, no fan of quivering pale rays. This was a single slash of milky light from the inner ranges to the stars, pulsing up in wild, flaring beauty.

"The road of Erlik!" the Kirghiz was hoarsely repeating. "And see, Erlik's shadow-demons come down it from the sky!"

Fallon *did* glimpse a flicker of movement down that incredible banner-beam of light! A movement the eye could not clearly distinguish, as of shadowy things racing headlong earthward down the beam.

The racing rush of shadowy movement ceased, as he detected it. The great sword of light wavered, twitched—and was gone.

"It was only a queer aurora!" he said hastily as he turned. "There's nothing—"

Chuck-a-boom! Chuck-a-boom! The little shaman drums were throbbing under the frantic hands of old Mursul and one of the other Kirghiz.

"Erlik's shadows come for us now!" screeched Mursul. "Only the *tiungur* drums will save us!"

Shadows? There *were* little shadows gliding over the moonlit plain between them and the nearby pass! It was at them that Mursul and the others were staring in horrible fright.

Frenziedly louder throbbed the little shaman drums above the keen of the rising wind.

"Hell, it's only cloud-shadows!" Fallon swore. "Can't you see—"

Fallon stiffened as he looked up, his voice trailing into shocked silence. There were no clouds across the moon!

Yet the shadows out there on the dim plain were still gliding, swirling, advancing—

"*Dwar Erlik!*" sobbed Mursul's shrill voice over the frantic drumming. "The shadows of Erlik!"

The horses plunged wildly away from the camp, trying to break their hobbles, squealing in terror.

Fallon ran after them. "Your damned drums are scaring the ponies! Stop it!"

The drumming, the hoarse incantations, didn't stop. Fallon got the bridles of two of the ponies and tried to quiet their wild plunging.

THEY dragged him farther from the campfire and the rattling drums, away from the direction of the looming range. Fallon yelled for help that didn't come, and mentally damned all superstition.

Hanging to the bridles of the maddened ponies, he glimpsed an incredible scene at the campfire back there. The shadows were swirling around it!

Like dusky man-shapes those shadows

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glided around the red fire and the little knot of huddled men, as though questing—

Chuck-a-boom! Boom!

The hovering shadows there seemed oddly to recoil from that storm of dissonant vibration from the shaman drums!

The two ponies Fallon held broke their hobbles with an almost human scream of terror, and tore free from his grasp.

"Fallon-khan!" screeched Mursul's voice from over the crazy clatter of drums.

Fallon whirled, and froze motionless. One of the gliding shadows was close to him in the silver moonlight!

There were others behind it. And they were not flat shadows on the ground. They were erect, manlike shadow-shapes—like dark ghosts gliding toward him.

Fallon's heart hammered as that nearest shadow-shape approached him. This couldn't be real—it couldn't—

It was a girl-shape, this approaching shadow. A dark wraith slim and youthful, so sharply outlined beneath the moon that he could *see* its silhouette of lithe body and shapely little head, and reaching arms—

Those shadow-arms touched him! Fallon felt an icy, numbing shock in which the moonlit plain, the firelight and the thump of the shaman drums, seemed to recede to an immeasurable remoteness.

Shadow-face, girl's face, was close to his as his senses reeled into the abyss! Like the silhouette of a sweet, strange face he saw it, as unconsciousness pressed upon his brain.

Fallon was dimly aware that with an unsubstantial shadow-arm leading him, he was walking stiffly and without volition. Walking toward the moonlit mountain-range, toward the dark split of the pass!

He heard Mursul's screech of terror as though from far away in time and space.

"Fallon-khan!"

Then unconsciousness possessed him completely.

II

FALLON awoke slowly. He seemed to struggle back to consciousness through numbing mists. He lay looking dazedly around him.

He was lying in a dusky stone room, a small chamber with high groined ceiling. One tall, unglazed window framed an erect oblong of moonlight. Wind whispered into the moonlit chamber from the opening.

"Why, what—" Fallon muttered numbly. And then suddenly crashing waves of memory rocked his mind.

"The Kirghiz! The shadows they were afraid of—good God!"

Fallon sprang erect, trembling and wild, clutching for support the ancient-looking bronze couch on which he had been lying.

It and two equally ancient bronze chairs were the only furniture of the dusky stone chamber. The corrosion of the bronze pieces, the thick dust in corners, spoke of ages of non-use.

"A shadow—a girl-shadow—that gripped my arm and led me away! Led me *where?*"

He stumbled toward the open window and stared wildly out into the moonshot darkness. And he looked out on a dark, fantastic city.

Domed, massive buildings of dark stone bulked somber in the silver moonlight. He was himself high in one of these round buildings.

Some distance away bulked the biggest mass—a domed, dark citadel that loomed starkly above all else. But there was no light or sound there, nor anywhere else in this weirdly unmodern metropolis.

"A dead city," Fallon whispered. "Like those whose ruins Stein found up by Khotan. But this one, hidden here inside the mountains—"

He had glimpsed the ring of frowning peaks and scarps that surrounded the silent, moonlit city on all sides.

He had come through the pass into this mountain-guarded land, without his own volition! Had come, led by—shadows!

Fallon fought rising terror. This was delirium, surely. He'd had some kind of mental lapse, had wandered into this dead city—

But was the city dead? His heart jumped suddenly. He had glimpsed movement down in those dark, silent streets.

He leaned from the window, straining his eyes. Yes, there was something stirring vaguely in the streets below.

Shadows moved in those streets! Dark, erect human shapes that were like the shadowy wraiths of men and women!

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"The land of Erlik, King of Shadows, whose city is forbidden Santahar—" The old Kirghiz' warning echoed now in his mind.

With a strangled cry, Fallon recoiled from the window and stumbled panically toward the door of the room. Then he stopped short.

In the doorway poised a human-figured thing of darkness, a shadow that poised, watching him!

A shadow? No, it was more like a human figure composed of opaque dark gasses, now that he saw it clearly.

He recognized the dark silhouette as a girl's slim figure, and remembered at once the high-cheekboned little profile of the face.

"You—whoever, whatever you are—you brought me here!" Fallon said aloud, hoarsely. "I remember, now."

She—he could not think of that slim shadow by any other pronoun—glided toward him. Fallon recoiled, his skin crawling. But the gliding girl-shadow swiftly reached out a shadowy arm to touch him.

At the intangible touch, something of the paralysis of his former experience went through Fallon like an icy shock. But this time it did not numb his brain as before.

He seemed suddenly to see the girl-shadow before him more clearly—the sweet planes of her face, the watching eyes, the coils of dusky hair knotted behind her shapely little head.

"You are from the outer lands—the lands of Earth that lie beyond the mountains?" he heard her voice.

Her voice? No, he was not *hearing* her speak. He felt her speech, received it in his brain as a direct electric transmission of thought-currents, a clear, mental voice.

Some contact, some circuit between his mind and this girl of shadow, had been established by the touch of her hand.

"Who—what—are you?" Fallon whispered, staring wildly.

The answer came quickly. "Do not fear me! I am Valain of the First Race—the race that still dwells here in Santahar."

"Santahar?" He husked the name. "Then the Kirghiz told truth—this is the city of Erlik?"

"So you know of our Lord?" Valain said quickly. "Then legends still persist in the outer lands. But the other did not know—"

"The other?" For a moment, sudden excitement made Fallon almost forget the uncanny terror of this incredible experience. "The other? Do you mean a man like myself? Do you mean Rick Carnaby?"

The girl-shadow started. "Then you know the man Carnaby?"

"I'm John Fallon, his best friend, and I came here after him!" Fallon cried. "Then his plane did crash here? Where is he?"

"You shall see him soon," Valain assured. "But first, you go before Erlik. I am to bring you now."

Erlik? Devil-god of all Central Asia, dreaded rebel against heaven who was King of Shadows?

THE momentary excitement at his discovery that Rick Carnaby was here, sucked out of Fallon's mind and left him prey again to the horror of incredible realization.

This girl Valain who touched him, whose mind spoke so clearly into his—she was *shadow!* Not real! And Erlik—

"Fallon, do not fear me!" came her quick mental plea. "I *am* real, and I was once human like yourself!

"Here is no magic!" she added. "It is but the science of the First Race that has made us so. Erlik will explain."

Something in her reassurance, some deep earnestness in the mind that so strangely touched his, lessened Fallon's horror a little. He could not feel that this girl—this shadow—meant him harm.

Valain's shadowy arm led Fallon from the dusky room, down dark stone corridors and crumbling stairs to the street.

And here in the moonlit street came and went the shadowy people of Santahar! Like Valain they were, human figures of dark non-solidity, gliding the ancient avenues, meeting and greeting silently.

Fallon moved unsteadily with Valain down that silent street of dark, thronging shadow-shapes. And the wraith-like men and women seemed to halt and look at him in wonder, as he passed.

"There's nothing supernatural!" he told himself frantically. "These shadow-people are natural, somehow."

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They approached the looming dome of the central citadel. As they passed through its high, open portals, Fallon stopped. With a wonder transcending fear, he gazed into the great fane within.

In the lofty dome of this vast room was a wide, round opening through which the moonlight poured in a silver flood. It was reflected dazzlingly by a great circle of crystal set in the center of the floor.

Fallon saw shadow-shapes in here too—some just inside the portals, and others at the other side of the great room where rose a low stone dais that bore a massive bronze throne.

Valain's shadowy arm was urging him forward. "Lord Erlik awaits you! Come!"

Fallon took a few mechanical steps inside the portals, and then something happened that he would never forget.

A shadow-shape glided suddenly from the little group inside the doors—a big, bulky male shape of darkness that seemed oddly familiar. It grasped Fallon's arm in that unsubstantial contact, and then—

"Johnny! Johnny Fallon!"

Fallon didn't hear that cry, other than mentally by the same strange telepathic contact as with Valain.

But though it was not auditory, something in its fiber triggered his memories so that instantly he recognized that oddly familiar silhouette that towered beside him.

"Rick Carnaby!" he cried. "Changed into—good God!"

IT WAS the ultimate horror, to Fallon's rocking mind. Not even the shadowy hosts of Santahar had assaulted him with equal horror.

For Valain and those other people of the First Race, he had seen as shadow-shapes from the first. But big, grinning Rick Carnaby, transformed by hell-born magic into an unreal shadow of himself—

He fought for control, as he heard Rick's alarmed, agonized thoughts. "Johnny, you followed me here? You shouldn't have come!"

The big, wide-shouldered figure, the battered, button-nosed face, they were utterly familiar even in dark silhouette. He could even see the tautness in Rick's face, his clenched hands.

"What did they *do* to you?" ripped Fallon's cry. "It's horrible—"

"Johnny, listen, you don't understand!" Rick Carnaby began swiftly.

Then that nightmare scene was interrupted by Valain's clear, utterly urgent mental voice.

"Lord Erlik is watching. You *must* come now!"

Fallon felt himself tugged forward by that paralyzing force the girl-shadow could wield. He stumbled unseeingly in his horror.

Valain did not lead across that brilliant circle of crystal in the center, but around the edge of the room to the dais.

Fallon found himself standing before the dais, looking up dazedly at the massive, tarnished bronze throne that stood upon it.

On that throne, looking down at him, there sat—a shadow. A dark, living silhouette of a young man whose profile was cleanly handsome.

"Lord Erlik!" whispered Valain's thought to him.

Erlik! The legended King of Shadows dreaded for ages by half of Asia! The Fallen One, the foe of heaven!

Fallon felt blind hatred rage up in his mind. The brooding, unhuman shadow up there might be the prototype of Satan and Ahriman, but he was not afraid. Hatred swept fear from his brain.

"You're the one who did that to Rick Carnaby!" Fallon husked, glaring up at the shadowy shape. "Made him unhuman!"

Erlik's clear mental voice, calm and silvery, came into Fallon's mind telepathically without need even of shadowy contact.

"Yes, Fallon, I did that, just as I did it to my own people of Santahar long ago."

Fallon's trembling rage exploded. He bounded forward onto the dais, and his hand ripped his automatic from his belt. He fired a stream of shots into the shadowy shape on the throne.

Simultaneous with the thunderous echoes of the gunfire came a telepathic cry from Rick Carnaby, just behind him.

"Johnny, *don't!* Wait—"

The shots had not harmed Erlik. It had been madness to think they could harm one whose body was not of solidity.

But as the last bullet crashed harmlessly

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against the back of the throne, Erlik's shadowy arm reached swiftly forward. It touched Fallon's face.

The terrific shock of that energy-laden contact seemed to sweep Fallon violently into roaring blackness.

III

IT SEEMED to Fallon that he was a shadow like Erlik, and that with Erlik he moved through a blackness vast and immeasurable.

He was clearly conscious of the strange quality of his new body. For it was a body that his mind inhabited, and not mere shadow. A body that was of discrete particles of force, instead of matter!

He and Erlik glided together through that awesome abyss, moving without hindrance across spatial dimensions at velocities beyond the leap of thought. And they were rushing toward a vast, lenticular shower of sparks that blazed in the dark.

"Now behold, John Fallon!" came Erlik's silver voice. "You see beneath you the galaxy of stars that is Earth's home!"

Fallon *did* see. He saw, as he heard, not by ordinary sensory organs but by vastly more flexible and subtle senses that pulsed inside his new, strange body of shadowy force.

He saw that burning host of stars from a dozen different points of view at the same time, from far away and from very close—and all these segments of vision were unconfused in his mind.

Erlik's voice rang again into his mind, as he stared wonderingly.

"You see our galaxy as it was long ago when the First Race ruled all of its starry spaces, before the Aliens came!"

Fallon's strange new vision leaped across a spectacle of wonder. He saw human-peopled worlds, in thousands on tens of thousands. He saw their ships flash through space from star to star.

He knew that this was the First Race, his own human race, which was not child of Earth as he had supposed but long ago had merely colonized Earth as an incident in its glorious expansion through the universe.

"Yes, the First Race of which Earth's peoples are the unknowing descendants," murmured Erlik. "You have seen their ancient glory. And now see how that glory ended."

Fallon saw that out of the shoreless abyss outside the galaxy came strange, brooding bulks of blackness without form or figure. And these alien entities could combine and recombine in great groups.

They were outsiders, life evolved in the unimaginably remote abyss. They invaded the galaxy in hosts, settled upon worlds like brooding vampires. The weapons of the First Race could not harm them.

"They are the Aliens!" rang Erlik's somber thought. "Creatures not of matter but of energy, evolved in the gulfs outside our cosmos. They invaded our worlds, enslaved us by billions. They drove us back across the galaxy till this little Earth was our last free world.

"Then in the city Santahar on Earth, we scientists of the First Race took counsel. We could not resist the Aliens with ordinary weapons. Soon they would conquer and enslave the last free remnant of our race here, unless we found a way to match their powers.

"I, Prince Erlik, found the way! We must become like the Aliens, creatures of force rather than matter! Then we could meet them on equal terms. I devised the instruments that transformed each material particle of our bodies into a tiny vortex of undying energy, so that our new bodies of energy retained our mind-patterns and knowledge and will.

"Thus we of Santahar long ago became—undying shadows. The other peoples of Earth recoiled from our plan, would not follow us. And in time, we of Santahar became mere fearful legend to them.

"But *we,* in the ages since then, have lived on in our undying new bodies and have held off the Aliens from Earth! We have warded the unsuspecting Earth whose myths told of us as foes of heaven! Now see that war in far-off space we have waged to beat back the Aliens!"

John Fallon glimpsed that awful struggle. He saw the shadow-hosts of Santahar flash out into trackless space again and again, along that rushing beam of light they called the Road.

He saw the Aliens whose formless bulks

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ever and again glided toward Earth, each time met and driven back by Erlik's shadowy hosts. His mind reeled at the spectacle of incredible battle out there between Earth and Sirius—shadows fighting with weapons of their own vital energy that they could launch in blinding bolts.

"Ever we have pressed them a little farther back!" rang Erlik's cry. "Soon, we will free the enslaved humans of Sirius' worlds from them. And then, with an added strength, we shall press on until we have won back all the galaxy for the First Race!

"That is the struggle which unknown to Earth has gone on for ages, John Fallon! The struggle in which you too can play a part—as one of us!"

Fallon felt a wild throb of mingled excitement and dread. And then he felt his shadowy form changing back into his own solid body—

He opened his eyes. He was lying on the bronze couch in that dusky stone chamber where he had first awakened.

"Good God!" he cried. "Then all that was a dream—"

His voice trailed off. Over him bent a shadow—Valain!

"It was no dream, Fallon," came Valain's quick telepathic assurance. "Erlik held your mind for a little time, and what he showed you was true. And then I led you back here, at his command."

Fallon looked up numbly at her sweet-profiled silhouette of darkness. "Then all you—shadows—were really human once?"

"Yes, Fallon." Valain's answer was faintly wistful. "But that was long ago. We became like this, so that we could match the Aliens."

Her thought was almost pleading. "Do we seem so horrible to you because of that?"

Fallon shook his head dazedly. "God, no! If all that was true, you of Erlik's people have guarded Earth from the Aliens for ages!"

Then sudden sharper remembrance made him sit up. "But Rick! You didn't have to make *him* one of you! Why did you do it?"

"Johnny, listen!"

It was Rick Carnaby's mental voice that echoed in Fallon's brain. He spun around.

THE bulky, shadowy figure of Rick stood behind him, a hand on his shoulder. Again, Fallon felt passionate resentment at the sight.

"Rick, I've hunted for you and now I've found you like this! Isn't there some way you can be changed back to your own body?"

Rick Carnaby's thought came solemnly. "Johnny, I don't want to be changed back. It would only mean that I would die."

"You'd die?" repeated Fallon, bewildered. "But why—"

"Johnny, listen! My plane crashed here in Santahar and I was fatally hurt. I was dying when Erlik used the forces of which he is master, to transform me into this shadow-body of energy!

"They saved me from death by making me one of them. And I *am* one of them now, helping in that great fight against the Aliens."

Incredulous amazement held John Fallon as he looked up into the shadowy face of his friend.

"Rick, you mean that *you* have gone out there beyond our Earth, too?"

"Many times, I've come and gone by the Road," Rick Carnaby answered simply. His thought rang eager. "And fighting the Aliens out there beats flying against Japs, Johnny! This is a fight for all Earth!"

Fallon remembered something out of that swift vision that Erlik had poured into his mind. He felt an icy chill.

"They're going to do the same thing to me?" he whispered. "Make *me* shadow, too?"

Valain answered troubledly. "Erlik says that you must not go back to carry news of us to outer Earth. We would have hordes of your folk coming here, attempting to enter Santahar.

"Therefore, says Erlik, you must stay in Santahar! You can stay as one of us, letting Erlik's science transform you. Or if you refuse, he will cast you into mindless sleep from which you will not awaken."

Fallon felt a shrinking horror at that dreadful choice offered him.

"I couldn't give up my real body, become a shadow!"

"You must decide by tomorrow night," Valain said troubledly. "For then the Road will be opened to send more of us out to

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Sirius. And Erlik himself is to lead those of us who go this time."

Rick Carnaby's thought broke in tautly. "Johnny, I won't let them do it to you! You came here after me—it's my fault—"

"What can you do to save him?" murmured Valain to Rick. "Erlik has set me to watch him. Even if he evaded me and escaped outside the mountains, we could follow and seize him as we did last night."

Fallon looked at her dazedly. "You were sent to seize me because I was too near the mountains? Why didn't you take the Kirghiz too?"

"Their drums held us back," Valain told him. "The vibrations prevent our seizing their minds. But *you* were not near the drums."

"A trick of vibration, Johnny," nodded Rick. "The Central Asian shaman cult evolved it out of superstition but it has sound scientific basis. The drums produce a pattern of sonic vibrations which by self-hypnosis defends the shamans against mental attack."

Bright morning sunlight had crept into the stone chamber. And Rick Carnaby, a fantastic shadow-figure in the light, turned away.

"Tomorrow is already here," his thought came swiftly. I'm going to see Erlik now! I'll make him let you go, Johnny!"

"It is useless," murmured Valain. "Erlik will not change his decree."

But Rick's thought beat confidently into Fallon's mind. "Keep your nerve, Johnny! I'll be back!"

As his big, shadowy figure glided out of the room, Fallon looked numbly after him. His stunned mind still could not realize the dread fact that this might be his last day of human life.

He to become a shadow-shape of energy? Impossible, an unreal nightmare! It could not happen—

From Valain's slim, shadowy figure came a questioning thought. "Are you hungry? I had almost forgotten that you might be."

Fallon had forgotten too, but now he numbly realized that he had not eaten for many hours and that his throat was dry with thirst.

"There is still food of a sort here in Santahar," Valain told him. "Come!"

He followed her mechanically down crumbling stairs and out the back of the massive building, into what had once been a gracious garden.

Trees shaped like conifers but bearing pale yellow and rosy fruit had run wild here. They grew amid brush and weeds, clustering thickest around a ruined stone spring that still gushed icy water.

As he ate the pulpy, insipid fruits, Fallon felt that dazing horror lift a little from his brain. Valain watched him curiously.

"*We* drink energy from vortexes of force here in Santahar, so that when we return to the struggle we can be strong," she said.

Her slim, dark silhouette poised in the bright sunlight, as she looked around the ruined garden.

"In the old days, this was the loveliest spot in Santahar," she murmured. "I remember walking here on moonlit nights, long ago."

It struck Fallon suddenly, the realization that she had once been as humanly real as himself.

He could picture Santahar as it had been then—a splendid city of fair men and women. Men and women who now were undying shadows!

IV

"YES, Santahar was beautiful then but the shadow of the Aliens was over it," said Valain. "We knew that soon they would come to Earth as they had invaded all our other worlds.

"Thus, when Erlik's science opened the way for us to change and resist the Aliens, we did not hesitate. We stepped willingly out of our former life, into the age-long struggle.

"But yet"—her thought had a poignant quality—"yet I cannot forget that other life. I wish that for a little time, for a very little time, I could be human once again."

"I wish so too. Valain!" Fallon said impulsively. "I've never met a girl like you."

She looked down at him, and in the tilt of her shadowy little head, in the tone of her thought, was a touch of diablerie.

"Is it possible that you would waste soft words upon—a shadow?"

"I can't think of you as that, Valain," he

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said slowly. "Any more than I can think of Rick so."

The little flash of gay mockery vanished as she put her shadowy hand in an intangible touch against his.

"I am glad you said that, Fallon. I am glad that you do not think of me with horror."

"Valain, couldn't the process that changed you be reversed?" Fallon asked suddenly. "Couldn't you become real again and leave here?"

Her shadowy figure started. "I could not do that! It is true the change can be reversed, but I couldn't leave Erlik and the others."

"You don't want to live human life again?" he asked, puzzled.

There was the quality of a sob in Valain's telepathic cry. "I would give centuries of this immortal shadow-existence for one year of real human life again! But I could not desert Erlik and our host now when our age-long battle nears a crisis. For in the struggle with the Aliens out there, a crisis is near at hand."

Fallon was silent a moment. "I understand, Valain. I've been a soldier. And if I *do* have to join you and share your fight—"

Emotion seemed to quiver through her shadowy figure as she interrupted. "Let us not speak of what may come tonight! Tell me of your world and people, Fallon."

He talked, sitting there in the silent, ruined garden while the sun wheeled overhead. Telling of Earth's lands and peoples, of their wars and ways, he forgot that it was a shadow-shape who listened.

He could not think of the slim, silhouetted figure beside him as other than a real and living girl. And it seemed to Fallon that in their quick and complete mental rapport he found a kinship of spirit he had found in no other woman.

"I wish I could see those cities," Valain murmured. "For so long, I have known nothing but dead Santahar and the Road that takes us out to the struggle in the great abyss."

"Do none of you ever perish in that struggle with the Aliens?" he asked her.

"Many have perished," she answered soberly. "But we have recruited our numbers from those who strayed in here, as you and Rick did. And once Sirius' worlds are liberated, we shall have great hosts to help."

Then her shadowy arm made a quick gesture toward the sky. "The day is dying, already. Rick should have returned."

Fallon felt a cold thrill along his nerves as he realized that hours had passed and that night was not far away.

"I hope that he has won Erlik to let you go," Valain murmured. "But I am afraid—"

When they went back into the dusky building, Rick Carnaby was just returning. And in the way the big, shadowy figure approached them, Fallon read defeat.

Rick's thought was desperate. "For hours, Erlik wouldn't see me. And when he did, he rejected my plea. He says that in this crisis we can't risk Fallon going away and bringing outsiders back to Santahar!"

Fallon tried to keep his face unmoved. "You did your best, Rick. It seems that I've no choice but to become—one of you."

"I won't let it happen!" stormed Rick desperately. "I'll do something—"

Valain's clear thought interrupted. "There is nothing you can do. But *I* could get Fallon away."

Fallon stared at her shadowy face in amazement. And Rick's thought was incredulous. "You, Valain? But why should you—"

She interrupted passionately. "Because today I have remembered our old human life, and I do not want to rob another of that life! Because I do not want Fallon to share our shadowy immortality!"

HER thoughts raced swiftly. "Soon all our people will be gathering in the citadel for the opening of the Road. I can guide Fallon out of Santahar to the pass. Before night ends, he can be far outside the mountains."

"But Erlik set you as his guard!" Rick Carnaby exclaimed. "When he learns what you have done—"

"I'll not let you help me if it brings danger to you, Valain!" cried Fallon.

"There is no danger!" retorted the shadow-girl. "Lord Erlik will be very angry, but that is all. For the great crisis of our

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struggle is too near for him to think long of this matter."

She turned back to Rick Carnaby. "But you must not go with us. If you are not there when the Road opens, Erlik would suspect."

Rick's shadowy form bent nearer the haggard Fallon. "Then—then this is good-bye, Johnny. I wish we could shake hands!"

Fallon felt a lump in his throat. "Good-bye, Rick."

And then the other was gone, gliding out of the dusky room. Rick Carnaby, gusty, swearing war-pilot of the old days, now a shadow-warrior on his way to greater struggle than any Earthly war!

Night had come down upon Santahar, and the moon already cast slanting silver beams over the dark domes. And through the window, Fallon saw the shadow-hosts converging through the streets upon the looming citadel of Erlik.

Valain's shadowy hand touched him, with that little tingling shock that the contact always brought.

"We must start now!" she told him. "For a little time, the way is clear."

Her intangible touch was still upon his arm, leading him, as he went down with her into the street.

Valain led swiftly through the moon-bright city. They met no shadow-shapes as they traversed its silent ways. But as they neared the edge of Santahar, there came a sound from behind them.

IT WAS a sharp, twanging sound as of forces suddenly released. And looking back, Fallon saw that now a tremendous beam of milky light stabbed up from Erlik's citadel toward the stars of Canis Major.

"The Road has been opened!" Valain's thought came swiftly. "Now those who bring report to Erlik from the struggle will come down it. And soon then we will be missed! We must hurry!"

Fallon started to run, with Valain gliding effortlessly beside him. As he ran, he looked back again.

He saw now that strange flicker of shadowy things racing down the flaring Road! Shadow-warriors, couriers from the great struggle out there by Sirius, racing back to Santahar with report for Erlik!

"Faster, Fallon!" begged Valain. "The pass is still far away—"

IT SEEMED to Fallon that he was running faster than any man normally could, that Valain's shadowy touch on his arm was pouring vital energy into him to spur him forward.

The mountain-wall loomed ever vaster before them. Now amid its moon-silvered cliffs he could make out the dark crack of the pass.

"We are near, now!" Valain encouraged. "Once you are far outside, you will be safe."

And then suddenly, swifter than the eye could follow, something flashed through the moonlight from behind them.

And abruptly, in the very mouth of the narrow pass, there stood a dark shadow-shape confronting them.

"Lord Erlik!" cried Valain, despair ringing in her thought.

Fallon felt an iciness grip him. For the dark silhouetted figure that stood before was clearly recognizable.

Erlik, indeed! And the Lord of Shadows was advancing toward them, gliding nearer until his handsome profile was clear in the moonlight.

"Did you think so easily to deceive me, Valain?" came his calm thought.

"There is no escape now, John Fallon!" sobbed Valain's mental cry. "I hoped for you—"

Her despair triggered a rage in Fallon equal to that hot passion with which once before he had faced Erlik. His fists clenched despite his awareness of the futility of the gesture.

"It's all right, Valain," he said huskily. "I'm not afraid."

Erlik was looking curiously at the shadow-girl as Fallon tried to comfort her.

His silvery mental question was wondering. "So even a shadow can love, Valain? After all these ages?"

"It is so," Valain answered hopelessly. "But I didn't want to keep him with me as a shadow. I wanted him to live his human life."

Erlik's thought was musing. "I had almost forgotten our human emotions of long ago. Almost—"

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Then his mental voice came decisively. "Fallon can go free. It matters not now if he brings the outside world to Santahar. For tonight we, *all* of us, leave Santahar by the Road!"

Exaltation throbbed from him. "Yes, tonight word has come that at last we have liberated the enslaved First Race of Sirius' worlds! Now we go out to lead their hosts in the final struggle that will drive the Aliens completely from our galaxy!"

Valain started. And then her shadowy figure turned toward Fallon. "Then this is farewell, Fallon!"

In Fallon's rioting mind, one thing stood out with passionate intensity. He leaned toward her sweet, shadowy face.

"Valain, you said you loved me! And I know now I love you, shadow or girl or both!"

Her thought yearned. "Fallon, you cannot love a shadow!"

"I do!" he cried. "I can't let you go!"

Erlik broke in calmly. "She must go, for this is the great hour for which we have lived our shadow-life for ages. But some day, she may return and change."

"I *will* return!" cried Valain. "I will come back to you and become human again for you, Fallon!"

For a moment, Fallon felt shadowy arms around him, shadowy face against his own —a bitter-sweet, intangible touch.

And then she and Erlik were gone—shadow-king and shadow-girl gliding away beneath the moon toward the domes of Santahar and the flaring Road.

Fallon looked back with tears in his eyes, at the somber city. Minutes passed, and then he saw it—a great rush of hosts of shadowy figures racing up the shining Road. And then slowly the great beam faded, and the city of Santahar lay dark and empty even of shadow-life.

Gone, the King of Shadows and his shadow-host! Gone Rick Carnaby, out to fight his dog-fights now amid the stars! Gone, Valain—

But she would return. In his mind was the certainty, the knowledge that some day she would return and that a strange science would again make real the shadow-girl he loved and would always love.

Fallon turned and started into the pass. It was a long way to the outer world. And it would be a long way back, with the supplies that he would bring.

For he would come back, and here in Santahar he would be waiting when at last Valain returned.

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The House Beyond Midnight

YOU know how hard it is these days to get rooms—to even get one room. Well, you don't realize exactly how hard it is until you're actually out looking. It didn't help any that I'd lost my coat in the accident and that Eve's pretty face still bore an ugly mark on the cheekbone from when she'd leaped from the car.

When I'd walk into hotels and rooming houses and say, "Name's John Drew. This is my wife. I wonder if you have a room? Anything at all, they'd look me up and down and smile in that superior way that hotel clerks and rooming-house people have these days. No dice.

Even telling them of our most disastrous experience that morning drew little sympathy, much less a place to lay our weary heads. And so we found ourselves three thousand miles away from home and friends in a strange East Coast city with not too much money and evening coming on. For myself, I could have gotten by, but I certainly couldn't picture my lovely young wife spending the night bumming it on a subway station bench or riding around in a bus with me.

The only hostelry clerk that we'd met who seemed halfway human—though I'll admit these days they're an harassed bunch—suggested confidingly to us that our best bet was to head for the Everglade section of town, that by going from house to house we might, just might, find something, so we'd spent the last afternoon hours walking the streets with the care of a rookie policeman on his first beat, but there was nothing.

We sat on a bench in the Square and talked over our situation. Although she tried to smile bravely, I could see Eve was fagged out. There was plenty we needed and all of it seemed awfully far away sitting on this bench. I had an important business contact to make for my office the next day. In fact our choice of this section as a trip was a combination of business and honeymoon. That was one of the reasons why we'd decided not to get involved with the police that morning, a decision, although we didn't know it, that was to shape our next twenty-four hours in strange and hideous ways.

I slapped a mosquito absently on my wrist, hugged Eve tighter.

"Well, honey, we certainly can't stay here all night."

The Travelers' Aid people at the station had said kindly but with no hope that if we dropped around later that evening, they would certainly keep their ears open for us. We got up and began to walk. It was twilight. The avenues were gloomy and the street lamps, already lighted, did little about it. Some of the places we passed in retracing our steps I half-recognized or remembered because here a woman had shrilled, "Go away! We got no room." And there the janitor had laughed at us, and some place else a little black dog had barked.

Suddenly Eve's petite figure at my side stiffened. We both stopped, and I followed her pointing arm. Diametrically across the street was a house. Old, ramshackle, four stories, its brownstone front weatherbeaten and its high stoop sagging. But there outside a second-story window on a small rusty

A house that could never have been, and could never be again—seeable only by dead eyes!

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

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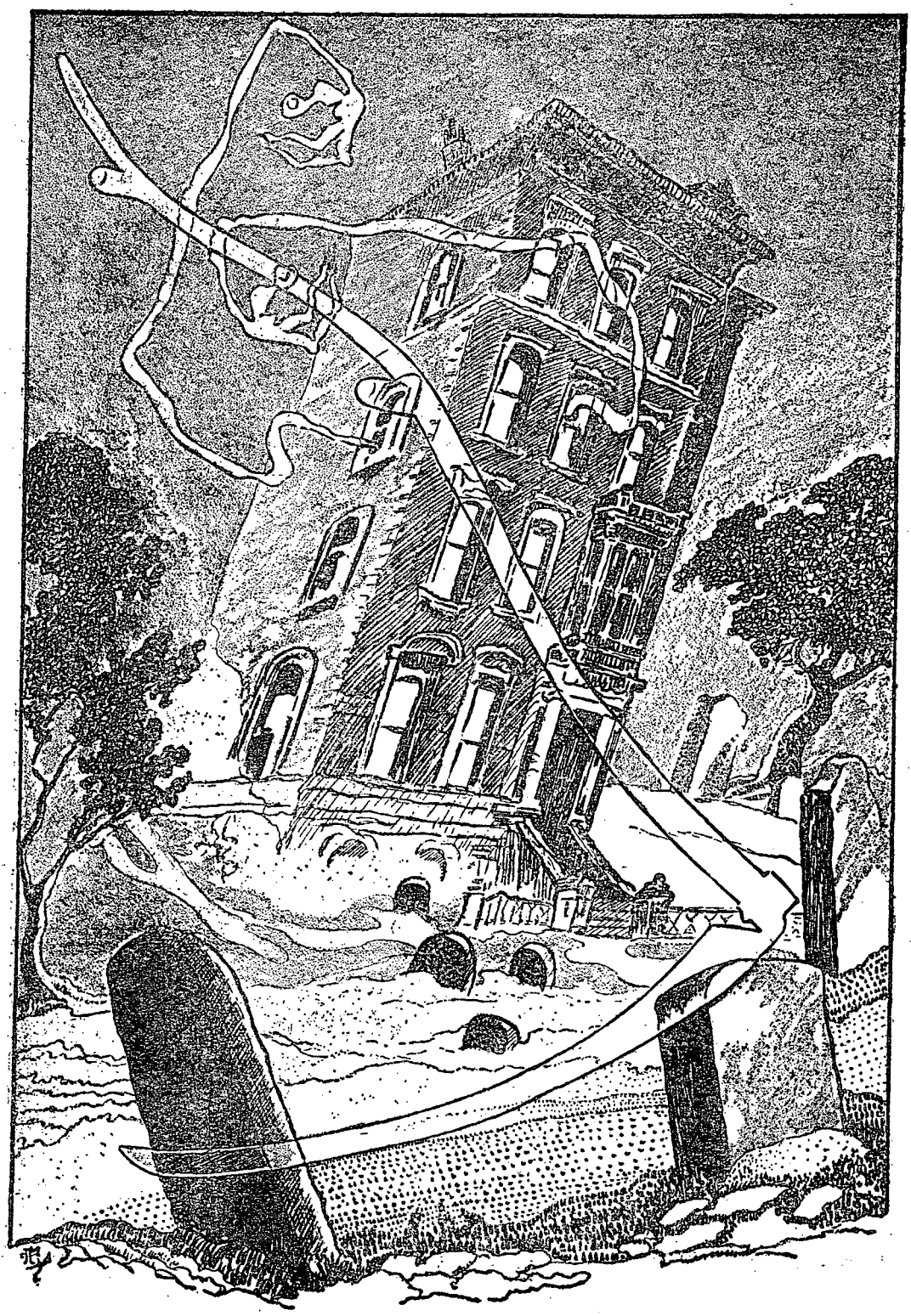
BY ALLISON V. HARDING



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bar was a white-painted sign with rude letters, ROOM TO LET.

WE FAIRLY ran, and still gasping, I had raised my hand to touch the bell when the door opened before us as though someone inside had seen our approach. A man stood there with fuzzy grayish-brown hair that needed cutting, a very white solemn face. He was dressed nicely, too nicely for the house, I thought fleetingly, but I remembered my tongue. "The room to let, is it. . . ?"

He nodded. I noticed then the newspaper under his arm. He glanced at it and then at us, and there was a mournful widening of his lips as though he were trying to smile. I burbled on about how desperately we were in need of finding a place. It was Eve's nudge that shut me up, for our landlord, if that he was, was paying little attention. I held out a twenty-dollar bill and said, "It's worth this to me."

He took it almost absently and then turned, motioning that we were to follow. The heavy door swung shut behind us, shutting out the city and its noises. The interior of the old house was even more gloomy than its outside. The paneling was wood, yellow with age. There was one ceiling light gleaming weakly in the hall, and by its light we followed the man to the stairs and up them.

We climbed three flights.

On the fourth floor he stopped and motioned to a door.

"We're very full just now."

Eve nodded and murmured something about how nice it was of him. The room wasn't much. It had two rude twin cots, a chair, and a table boxed in by faded strips of wallpaper.

"My name is Mr. Melkin," our guide introduced himself.

We nodded and I replied, "I'm John Drew, and this is my wife."

"Of course," said Melkin, "and now if you'll excuse me, I must go downstairs to join the others."

Alone in our two-by-four, the first thing we both did after congratulating ourselves was to sit down on the edge of our beds and take off our shoes.

"Better than the park bench, honey," I philosophized as I noticed my wife's rather critical looks around the room.

"I suppose so, Johnny, but for twenty dollars!"

We stretched out and enjoyed the luxury of relaxing for a while.

"There are things to be found out," I said. "For instance, what about meals? Certainly we're entitled to them for my one-night's rate of payment."

My mouth watered at the thought of a well-laid boarding house table. I left Eve and went down the creaking stairs. On the second floor there was a large back room taking the width of the building. From it I heard "people" sounds. My first feeling upon going in was one of embarrassment at my untidy appearance, for these people were neat, well-dressed, in some cases, richly so. But Mr. Melkin seemed in no way ashamed of me.

He came over from where he'd been talking to a group of men. It was on the tip of my tongue to ask him about supper when he said, "You're looking surprisingly well, you know."

I thanked him. I was about to return the compliment as convention dictates, but in all honesty, I couldn't. Mr. Melkin did not look surprisingly well. He looked surprisingly poor. You don't say those things, of course. Then he said that he wanted to introduce me to some of the others. I said that was jake but I knew I looked so terrible.

"You see, I lost my coat in an accident early this morning."

"Of course," said Mr. Melkin interrupting me almost impatiently. "You're like him," he said absently pointing into a corner.

I looked. There was a man there I hadn't seen at first, also without a coat but horribly disfigured, his scars looking almost open in the dim light. I looked away. Melkin's voice droned monotonously now making introductions. I smiled politely. The main thought in my mind was, *When do we eat?* The people, too, had a sameness that made it hard for me even if I'd been sincerely trying to remember their names. I wondered again why such rather well-dressed clientele should be in such a ramshackle, broken-down old house.

The times, I supposed.

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THEY certainly weren't a very lively bunch. They weren't any three I'd like to get to join me in a midnight's poker session, and the women, too, were on the rather subdued, glassy-eyed side. Finally, Melkin had finished, and I saw an opportunity to nudge him and ask how about supper.

"Will there be anything to eat?"

He almost glared at me, reared his white sepulchral head back and said firmly, "Drew, we don't go in much for jokes around here."

Jokes, I thought to myself. That's the brush-off. I guess the joke's on me. Twenty bucks a night for that lousy little room and no food thrown in. I was mad, so I didn't push the point. I'd take Eve out and we'd go to a restaurant somewhere. I still had a few dollars left.

Somebody else said, "You're looking surprisingly well."

Corny compliments these people handed out.

I went up the stairs to find Eve. She was pacing the floor nervously.

"Guess we'll have to go out to get some food, honey."

"Listen, Johnny, the funniest thing happened while you were downstairs." The words catapulted out of her. I could see Eve was upset. "Two women came in. At least, I looked up suddenly and found them standing inside the door. All dressed up, Johnny, and such stern gray faces! One of them said, 'This is Mrs. Drew,' and I nodded and the other said, 'You're looking surprisingly well.' Johnny, there was something sort of scarey about them. They seemed to know who I was and they told me who they were and they just stood there and looked. It was creepy the way they looked at me!"

I put my arms around Eve. She was an imaginative little thing, anyway.

"Just trying to be neighborly," I offered.

"But that wasn't all. When they turned around to go, one of them . . ." Eve made a sick face. "Really, Johnny, one of them had a hole in the back of her head you could put your fist into!"

I smiled in superior male fashion.

"Probably the way the shadows fell, honey."

"No, no, I tell you, I saw it! It was like someone had dug out the whole back of her head!"

"Oh, well," I laughed. "Some injury or something. Forget it. Look, we'll go out somewhere and get a bite to eat."

She said that was even worth putting her shoes on again for. We trapsied down the stairs. In the front hall we met Melkin.

"Just stepping out to get something to eat," I explained. "We'll be back in a moment."

He looked at me steadily, his pallid face expressionless. Finally he spoke.

"Surely you're joking."

I shook my head. What kind of double-talk was this? I explained again painstakingly and added, as though I needed further justification for our trip, "I want to pick up an evening paper, too."

He stood there staring at me appraisingly.

"Doubtless you have reasons, Mr. Drew, for your frivolity, but I can only say that this house is now closed. As for an evening paper, I believe we have one." He stepped to a sideboy and offered me the paper I'd seen under his arm earlier.

I WAS for making an argument out of it, but Eve tugged at me and pulled me up the stairs.

"Darling, it's better than spending the night out on that park bench! What of it, if he's a little eccentric. Certainly he's no more of a dragon than some of the other hotel people we've met."

I sighed. I didn't like backing down to old Cheeseface, but I knew Eve's words were of wisdom, and I went with her back up to our room.

Anyway, it was nice to take our shoes off again. My wife curled up at the window, and after looking out into the dim street for a moment over her shoulder, I sat down on one of the cots with the evening paper. Eve chattered away as she does and I answered monosyllabically, all the time absorbing the details of the box score on the day's ball game.

"Valley Street. This is Valley Street and Everglades Avenue, Johnny. I could swear we passed by here before. Certainly there was no sign then for a room to let. I wonder who left."

"Um hum," said I, reading about a great

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catch Hoskins had made in center field for the Blue Sox.

"'Fact I don't even remember this old house."

"Um."

Eve was silent then for a moment and I got finished with the story of the ball game. My eyes drifted downward idly over the page. They stopped. Something slugged me in the stomach. My jaw fell open. The heading said:

TWO DIE IN AUTO CRASH

August 9. Mr. and Mrs. John Drew of Briarville, California, died today in Westville River when their car skidded off Gormley Highway, police reported.

The type before my eyes swam a bit. Eve said, "What is it, dear?" and pattered over to my side. I had enough presence of mind to start to flip the paper shut but she was too quick for me. She read and sank down beside me.

"Johnny!" she said. "Johnny!"

I took her hand. I wanted to say all sorts of things about the ghastly mistake, about how we'd have to get down to Police Headquarters in a hurry the next morning and explain everything, and Eve, don't look so white—but strangely nothing came out.

Then the tapping came at the door and I sprang to my feet like an overwound spring. It was Melkin. He stood in the doorway regarding me with those sober, colorless eyes, and said, "Drew, you're new here and there are one or two things I have to explain to you about this place. You see, Drew, it's not an ordinary house!"

As our host advanced into the room towards us, the garish light of the ceiling fixture accentuated the pallor of the man, gave it an almost blue quality that was unearthly. I decided to seize the opportunity to speak before Melkin could.

"See here," I said with what I meant to be a disarming smile, "I certainly respect the rules of this boarding house, but something has come up that requires our attention immediately. Mr. Melkin, I am sorry but we'll have to go out just for a few minutes."

The gathering storm of displeasure showed on my host's face and I hurried on. Certainly under the circumstances my request was reasonable.

"You see, there's been a rather grisly mistake that needs correcting."

I FLIPPED the paper over, pointing to the article about our accident and "demise." I thought that this would surely cinch my argument. But instead of showing any interest, Melkin glanced casually at the item and then looked once again at me, his dark expressionless eyes unblinking. Most of the anger had left his face, and there was instead a look of almost scorn. I pushed on, almost embarrassed by the sound of my own voice in that small echoing chamber. I tried the smile again.

"It says John Drew and wife are dead, and being John Drew," I gave Eve's wrist an affectionate pinch, "and wife, I feel this has got to be corrected at Police Headquarters. We haven't any friends in this section of the country; but if the word got back to the Coast, it would be kind of a mean trick."

Melkin gazed at me as though my words had had no meaning. I stood up, took Eve's hand in one of mine and stepped towards the door. I am big enough to be able to see over other people's heads at parades and I didn't anticipate having any trouble with our host, and knew I looked rather menacing. However, Melkin merely grimaced a bit and admonished, "You can't hurt a dead man, you know! I am sorry, you can't go out!"

I gulped and stopped short. "Now wait a minute—!"

"You can't go out."

I reached for the paper again and thumped the item. "I tell you this has to be corrected! A thing like that can make a lot of trouble."

The boarding-house proprietor's lips curled almost in a sneer. Then he sighed.

"So many of you act this way," he said almost to himself, "but in time you'll get used to it. They all do."

His lips came back from yellowed teeth in what was supposed to be a smile. He turned and headed for the door and I was too amazed to do anything until finally I shouted "Melkin, my wife and I are leaving this place! If you don't want us to come back, well, that's too bad but we must speak

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to the police and have this business corrected!"

He turned at the door, looked back at us.

"You can't go out. Some of the others take time to get used to this idea, but one and all we have to reconcile ourselves to it. After all, Mr. Drew, you two are dead, you know!"

He left, shutting the door behind him. Eve was the color of the departed Melkin when I turned to look at her. I sat her on the bed and gripped her shaking hands, although mine were none too steady.

"Honey," I said, "the guy's loco. We'll get out of here."

"Johnny, he's so terribly white. You know, when I first saw him downstairs, I thought that. White like a dead person! And those women who came in to see me!"

She hid her head in her hands and her square little shoulders shook.

"Don't be silly," I blustered, spilling words of reassurance out as fast as I could but all the time thinking, What is this? Those people I'd blundered into downstairs. People? Creatures! Strange, and all with that peculiar pallor.

I COMFORTED Eve for a moment more and then I sprang to the door. Perhaps I expected it to be locked. It was not. It flew open. I leaped out into the hall. The corridor to the stairs was dim, and along its sides were lounging a score or more of figures. I took a step towards the stairs and the figures, men they were if you could call them that, tensed. Obviously, I was their business. I felt a sickness in my stomach. Even in the dim light, I could see that they were monstrous, misshapen and disfigured in one way or another.

Here was a man, or what had once been one, with a half-crushed skull. Someone else with a twisted back; a third with no leg, and so on. As I stood uncertainly, one of the creatures started towards me. I stepped hurriedly back inside our room and threw the bolt. I dreaded that Eve would discover what I had seen, that we were no longer free to leave the house but were guarded by an odd assortment of inhumans. Somehow, I now knew we had stumbled on some fantastic sort of insane asylum.

I turned away from the door and tried to smile for Eve. It was a poor attempt. I knew it. She knew it, but her smiling back bravely at me helped. It was a courageous, pathetic little gesture on her part and my heart thumped as I thought of her exquisite young beauty, and outside those profane, godless travesties of humanity.

I sat by her side and said softly, "Don't worry, honey, I'll think of something."

She looked as if she were going to cry. "What sort of place *is* this, Johnny?"

"Not the kind of joint I'd pick for you ordinarily, my sweet," I tried to joke.

"Is it some sort of private insane asylum, or something?"

So she'd thought of it too!

"I don't know."

"And why does everyone look so strange? That whiteness?"

The thought had persisted in my mind too.

"Not enough sunlight and vitamins," I quipped.

Whatever else we might have said was interrupted. A voice came from outside. It was Melkin.

"Drew," he called.

"Yes," I answered.

"You can see by now that it would be quite wrong for you to attempt to leave this house."

I said nothing.

"I think in time you'll understand that all this is for your own good. You see, we of the Older Ones know that sudden death has its shocking qualities, that after one has crossed into the Beyond, one still continues to try to live, psychically at least, in the dimensions and traditions of the living. You'll get used to being dead, Drew, you and your wife, and then you will be just like any of us.

"I wonder if you would open the aperture of this door a minute."

I looked and discovered the peep-slide that one finds on many apartment front doors. I peered through and saw with distaste the pallid face and shoulders of Melkin.

"I am placing outside your room," he went on as soon as he saw my eye at the aperture, "a trusted helper of mine to keep you from doing anything which, shall we say, you might regret!"

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AT THAT he gestured, and from one side came a heavy step. Suddenly, into my view loomed up a huge monster of a man. It was, I saw, surely one of the figures I'd seen lounging along the hall earlier. A monster of a man with a brutal face and one side of his head bashed in. It was an incredible, revolting sight, highlighted by the absurdity of the gay red-flowered tie he wore around his bull neck.

"This is Jacob," said Melkin. "He's going to stay outside your door and I would suggest you and Mrs. Drew get used to the idea of being in the Beyond. You will pardon, I'm sure, Drew, our little house joke, but you see one is dead such a long time that the sooner one becomes accustomed to it, the better."

The monstrous Jacob grimaced at this appreciatively, and I slammed the one-inch peep shut. I put my fingers to my lips, and Eve and I sat together on the bed, silently listening to the mute, unintelligible sounds of the house grow small and finally cease, until there was nothing but the soft rustle of the wind outside the window. My clock showed two-thirty.

It was then that I started a minute examination of the room in stocking feet. There was nothing of interest. No furniture even heavy enough to act as a formidable weapon. Finally I turned to the window and eased it up inch by inch. I looked out. There was a narrow ledge running the width of the house. The dingy, poorly lit street below was, of course, completely empty at this hour.

Eve was off the bed and after me as she sensed what was in my mind. Her tiny feet, likewise shoeless to keep from making a sound, pattered toward me.

"No, Johnny!" she clung to me. "We can't go out that way!"

"I'm going to take a look in the rooms on either side of us."

She pleaded with me.

"Nothing to it, Eve," I reassured. "Now just sit tight and I'll be right back.

She pulled at my arm desperately as though she could hold me back by main force, but finally I convinced her, and with a kiss I edged carefully out the window. If I were seen from the street and a call put in to the police, so much the better, but I knew the chances of anyone passing by in this section of the city and at this hour were infinitesimal.

The window to the right of ours was tightly locked, but with my eyes growing accustomed to the gloom, I could see that it opened into nothing more productive than a utility closet. There were brooms and odds and ends and shelves piled high with ill-arranged boxes and bric-a-brac.

RETRACING my steps gingerly, I went in the other direction, and on the left was rewarded by an open window. I eased myself through and found I was in a room very similar to ours, but with two doors. One, I figured, opened onto the stairs; the other was smaller, I found on closer examination not reaching quite to the floor. I opened it cautiously and found a small shaft before me, disappearing into blackness. A stout rope hung in the center, and suddenly it came to me that these old houses were often equipped with rope-pulley dumbwaiters to serve the different floors.

As I was about to shut the dumbwaiter door, voices came to me from some room adjacent to the shaft in the evil old house. Melkin's tones were unmistakable. He was talking with several other people, and I could tell that there was excitement between them, and then my ears caught my own name. I leaned way over the coping of the door and the voices came clearer.

"You fool!" said one voice which carried with its sepulchral tones a note of authority. "Their reported death was one of those imbecile mistakes that the authorities make!

"But . . ." whined Melkin defensively, ". . . I'd seen the item in the paper and naturally I thought—"

"You thought!" went on the other voice, and the strains had an oddly metallic reverberating character. "You know now, of course, what we must do and immediately!"

A third voice joined in agreeing.

"Yes," said Melkin. "People in this house-beyond-life must obviously be dead. If they are not—well, I shall attend to it."

"Do!" snapped the authoritative voice.

"At once!" replied Melkin, cowed.

I shut the door as quickly as I could and hurried toward the window. I still couldn't figure quite what the pitch was here, but

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that we were dealing with a deadly bunch of characters who now intended to murder us, I did not doubt. I gained our window and beckoned to Eve just as Melkin's rap came at the door. I hurried her over the ledge and pushed her into the next room. Melkin called again, and the rapping became louder. Then I heard his quick order to someone, probably Jacob, and as I slithered sideways along the ledge, one arm around Eve's waist, I heard the sudden splintering crash of wood panel and I pictured those pallid, loathsome faces and forms hurtling into the room we'd just left.

I hurried my wife into the next chamber, got in after her, shut and locked the window and then bolted the door. But I knew, my mind working now with the rapidity of desperation, that it would only be a matter of moments before these creatures of the Devil were upon us again. Already I heard steps outside in the corridor. Heavy, lumbering steps. Jacob, of course, and others. A few steps more and they would be splintering this door.

I whirled suddenly, opened the dumbwaiter shaft and jiggled the rope. It was a heavy rope and there was a weight at the end. Like a madman I heaved on the pulley, and groaning and creaking, finally the little two-shelved lift came up out of the darkness and drew level with us. There was no time for talk now. I swept Eve's soft round figure into my arms and stowed her into the dumbwaiter. I loved her more then than I think I ever had. No hysterics, no tears, just her white strained face turned toward mine.

She said, grasping quickly what was going on, "Please come with me, Johnny, or let me stay with you."

I shook my head, and that was that. I was the boss. With a prayer for her safety, I began to lower the waiter and Eve feverishly. This would, at least, throw them off for a while.

And then even before the thundering knocks came at the door of the room, I saw Melkin's diabolically evil face leering at me from the window. While slow-witted Jacob had lumbered down the corridor searching aimlessly, Melkin had anticipated my moves and come along the ledge in pursuit. Like a football player, I dove at the window, carrying the sash and glass with me, counting on catching myself against the bottom with my thighs.

My arms were outstretched in frenzied action. He must not surmise which way Eve's trail led. I felt my hands hit the solidity of his knees and then he pitched out from the ledge. It was so easy and I felt a little sick. I didn't look down, but there was the unmistakable sound of a human body landing four floors below on the cobblestones.

THERE was no time to be weak-kneed now, though. The door of the room was being attacked from the outside, and I heard Jacob's slobbering curses. Another idea came to me, and again I opened the shaft. I crawled in myself this time, gripping the rope with one hand and letting the dumbwaiter door shut behind me. Then, hand over hand, I lowered myself into that black pit, unmindful of the rope splinters digging into my fingers. Above, and always farther away as I let myself down, came the sound of those creatures pouring into the room Eve and I had left.

Finally my feet thumped against wood, and Eve's hushed voice came.

"Johnny?"

"Darling," I said. "Where are we?"

"I think it's some sort of sub-basement," she whispered.

I crawled between the top of the dumbwaiter and the opening of the shaft. It was a tight squeeze for a big man and I had no buttons left on my vest when I finally stood beside her in the darkness.

"Now let's be getting out of here!"

We explored and bumped our way in the darkness, and from what we ran into, I decided there were boxes and furnace fixtures, and what not. I tripped over one such something and then found to my joy that it was a heavy poker. I claimed it and we went on. "At least, honey," I said, "we won't be bothered with that Melkin any more. I took care of him!"

Eve didn't press me for details, but the thought of what I'd done to our murderous, sinister host no longer nauseated me.

Luckily we were standing behind some packing cases when the cellar door up ahead was thrown open abruptly. I pulled Eve

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down as light streaked the sub-basement. I couldn't see, but we were not yet out of the woods. People were coming. One of them was Jacob. Although there was no talk among them now, I could tell by the ponderous, lumbering footsteps. They had flashlights, and the wavering beams passed a few feet from where we crouched.

My heart thumped and turned over in my throat as someone leaned against our packing case. The others went on and I could see Jacob and two or three more. Then as though the sound of our breathing had drawn him, the man leaning against our packing case turned slowly, inexorably before us. I rose up and hit him with the poker with all my strength even before he'd turned fully toward us—even before I saw who it was. For had I seen, I never could have struck that mighty blow. It was Melkin! How shall I say it? Disfigured as a man is who falls four flights onto cobblestone, but Melkin, alive as he had been before. Alive, did I say? His words to me earlier that fateful night came back now. *You can't hurt a dead man!*

The force of my blow at his head shattered the bone and sent him reeling backward. But the injury was as nothing to him.

"Run, Eve!" I screamed. "Run for the door!"

She did my bidding and I charged after Melkin, who leered at me, his soulless, empty eyes looking like Satan himself in the battered head. It was Eve's scream that brought we whirling about. She had run fully into the huge Jacob, who stood half a body above her as he raised his massive arms around her, and I could see over her head that grotesquely humorous red-flowered tie of his.

I CHARGED toward my wife and the monster who sought to crush the life out of her body. Other limping, stumbling creatures were behind me thumping along in pursuit, but my eyes were fixed only on Jacob and Eve. I hit him with the crowbar and he let go of Eve to come at me, his ham hands spread apart. I sidestepped his elephant charge and shoved Eve toward the basement door that beckoned to us. She ran, and I followed, but at the steps Jacob with surprising speed caught us. He took the poker from my hands as though it were a slim reed of wood, one thick forearm snaked around Eve's legs and she, who had refused to dash up the steps to safety until I was beside her, fell gasping to the stairs.

I dove at Jacob and knew immediately that my strength, considerable though it was, would be no match for his. Others led by Melkin were coming up. I knew I had a few more seconds and then we would be prisoners again—and for good—in that evil house of monstrous horrors.

I let myself go completely slack, and my assailant taken unawares, relaxed his efforts against me. Eve, poor dear, doubtless thinking that I had been overcome, redoubled her own efforts and Jacob turned his attentions to her.

It was then that I sprang from out of my relaxed position. I caught Jacob off his balance with my shoulder, and at the same time swept Eve clear with one arm. He clawed at me desperately and I rammed my fingers into his bull-like neck. In the melee that gaudy, red-flowered tie ripped off in my grasp, but Jacob, thank God, lost his balance and stumbled backward down the stairs, knocking off those led by Melkin like so many tenpins.

In an instant more, Eve and I had scampered on up the stairs and somehow found ourselves outside in the night. We stumbled and staggered through dark, deserted, twisting streets. I drove Eve to frantic haste because behind, for a while I could hear the clumping, sinister sounds of those creatures in pursuit.

After a while we reached a brighter section of the city, and Eve fell against me.

"I can't go any further," she gasped.

I supported her the rest of the way to the nearest police station. We stopped outside to tidy up a bit, and looking into each other's face, we both realized at the same time that our preposterous story would never be believed. We decided to say nothing about our recent experience but only to mention and set right the report of our death in the automobile accident.

I made the overtures to the usual blase desk sergeant. He seemed considerably bored, but allowed as how those mistakes sometimes happen, and after all when a car skids into the river and is raised from

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under water with both doors sprung open and suitcases found, it's presumed that the parties have drowned and will, as he said in jolly fashion, turn up later somewhere floating in the river.

Sergeant Truckett, for so his name proved to be, was, though, interested in the tie that peeked out of my right-hand pocket. It was Jacob's, torn off him in the melee and I had stuffed it there absently.

"Yours?" said the sergeant.

I evaded a direct answer and he went on.

"Funny, you know, there's only one guy around here who wore ties like that. Was quite a character, he was. Loved those loud red-flowered ties. Just like that one, mister. Would have thought it was one of his," the good sergeant laughed.

"Who was this—?"

"Jacob, his name was. He was a wrestler in these parts. Great, big fellow. Died, oh about a year ago in an accident. He and his manager."

Eve put the question that flashed into my mind, too.

"Was his manager's name Melkin?"

The sergeant nodded. "Guess you know about 'em, eh? They say wrestling's crooked. Mebbe so, but they put on some great shows. I remember once this Jacob—"

We went out into the street, Eve and I, my arm around her waist, and we walked. Dawn was streaking the sky above the city, and without a word to each other but by apparent mutual consent, we turned our steps in the direction of that sinister four-story house. We wended our way down Everglades Avenue. Six blocks, five blocks, then three, two, and we were suddenly there across the street from where we'd spent the most harrowing night of our lives.

I think, looking back now, that I wasn't surprised, and I saw that Eve was not. We have not discussed it since, naturally. Of course, you have guessed it. There was no four-story, rambling house on the corner in the morning light. There was nothing. No sign of a house. Just an open lot with its incidental collection of rubbish.

I have the clipping from the paper. You don't often see the notice of your own death. The gaudy, red-flowered tie? No, I didn't keep that, for it belongs to Jacob . . . wherever he may be!

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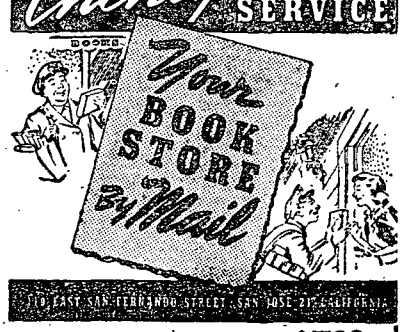

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Cellmate

BY THEODORE STURGEON

THEY say, "Ever been in jail?" and people laugh. People make jokes about jail. It's bad, being in jail. Particularly if you're in for something you didn't do. It's worse if you did do it; makes you feel like such a damn fool for getting caught. It's still worse if you have a cellmate like Crawley. Jail's a place for keeping cons out of the way a while. A guy isn't supposed to go nuts in one.

Crawley was his name and crawly he was. A middling-sized guy with a brown face. Spindly arms and legs. Stringy neck. But the biggest chest I ever did see on a man his size. I don't care what kind of a shirt they put on him. The bigger it was, the farther the cuffs hung past his hands and the tighter it was over his chest. I never seen anything like it. He was the kind of a lookin' thing that stops traffic wherever he goes. Sort of

It's bad, being in jail—especially if you're in with someone like....

Heading by LEE BROWN COYE

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a humpback with the hump in front. I'm not in the cell two weeks when I get this freak for a jail buddy. I'm a lucky guy. I'm the kind of lug that slips and breaks his neck on the way up to collect a jackpot playing Screeno in the movies. I find hundred-dollar bills on the street and the man with the net scoops me up for passing counterfeits. I get human spiders like Crawley for cellmates.

He talked like a man having his toenails pulled out. He breathed all the time so you could hear it. He made you wish he'd stop it. He made you feel like stopping it. It whistled.

Two guards brought him in. One guard was enough for most cons, but I guess that chest scared them. No telling what a man built like that might be able to do. Matter of fact he was so weak he couldn't lift a bar of soap even. Hadn't, anyway, from the looks of him. A man couldn't get that crummy in a nice clean jail like ours without leaving soap alone right from the time they deloused him when they booked him in. So I said, "What'samatter, bull? I ain't lonely," and the guard said, "Shut the face. This thing's got his rent paid in advance an' a reservation here," and he pushed the freak into the cell. I said, "Upper bunk, friend," and turned my face to the wall. The guards went away and for a long time nothing happened.

After a while I heard him scratching himself. That was all right in itself but I never heard a man scratch himself before so it echoed. I mean inside him; it was as if that huge chest was a box and sounding board. I rolled over and looked at him. He'd stripped off the shirt and was burrowing his fingers into his chest. As soon as he caught my eye he stopped, and in spite of his swarthy skin, I could see him blush.

"What the hell are you doing?" I asked.

He grinned and shook his head. His teeth were very clean and strong. He looked very stupid. I said, "Cut it out, then."

It was about eight o'clock, and the radio in the area below the tiers of cell-blocks was blaring out a soap opera about a woman's trials and tribs with her second marriage. I didn't like it, but the guard did, so we heard it every night. You get used to things like that and after a week or so you begin to follow them. So I rolled out of the bunk and went to the gratings to listen. Crawley was a hulk over in the corner; he'd been here about twenty minutes now and still had nothing to say, which was all right with me.

THE radio play dragged on and wound up as usual with another crisis in the life of the heroine, and who the hell really cared, but you'd tune in tomorrow night just to see if it would really be as dopey as you figured. Anyway, that was 8:45, and the lights would go out at nine. I moved back to my bunk, laid out a blanket, and began washing my face at the little sink by the door. At ten minutes to, I was ready to turn in, and Crawley still hadn't moved. I said:

"Figurin' to stay up all night?"

He started. "I—I—no, but I couldn't possibly get into that upper bunk."

I looked him over. His toothpick arms and legs looked too spindly to support a sparrow's weight, let alone the tremendous barrel of a chest. The chest looked powerful enough to push the rest of him through a twenty-foot wall. I just didn't know.

"You mean you can't climb up?"

He shook his head. So did I. I turned in. "What are you going to do? The guard'll look in in a minute. If you ain't in your bunk you'll get solitary. I been there, fella. You wouldn't like it. All by yourself. Dark. Stinks. No radio; no one to talk to; no nothin'. Better try to get into that bunk." I turned over.

A minute later he said, without moving, "No use trying. I couldn't make it anyway."

Nothing happened until three minutes to nine when the lights blinked. I said "Hell!" and swung into the upper bunk, being careful to put my lucky bone elephant under the mattress first. Without saying a word —and "thanks" was noticeably the word he didn't say—he got into the lower just as we heard footsteps of the guard coming along our deck. I went to sleep wondering why I ever did a thing like that for a homely looking thing like Crawley.

The bell in the morning didn't wake him; I had to. Sure, I should've let him sleep. What was he to me? Why not let

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the guard pitch icewater on him and massage his feet with a night-stick? Well, that's me. Sucker. I broke a man's cheekbone once for kicking a cur-dog. The dog turned around and bit me afterwards. Anyway, I hopped out of my bunk—almost killed myself; forgot for a minute it was an upper—and, seeing Crawley lying there whistling away out of his lungs, I put out a hand to shake him. But the hand stopped cold. I saw something.

His chest was open a little. No, not cut. Open, like it was hinged—open like a clam in a fish market. Like a clam, too, it closed while I watched, a little more with each breath he took. I saw a man pulled out of the river one time in the fall. He'd drowned in the summer. That was awful. This was worse. I was shaking all over. I was sweating. I wiped my upper lip with my wrist and moved down and grabbed his feet and twisted them so he rolled off the bunk and fell on the floor. He squeaked and I said, "Hear that bell? That means you're through sleeping; remember?" Then I went and stuck my head under the faucet. That made me feel better. I saw I'd been afraid of this Crawley feller for a minute. I was just sore now. I just didn't like him.

He got up off the floor very slowly, working hard to get his feet under him. He always moved like that, like a man with nothing in his stomach and two hundred pounds on his back. He had to sort of coil his legs under him and then hand-over-hand up the bunk supports. He was weak as a duck. He wheezed for a minute and then sat down to put on his pants. A man has to be sick or lazy to do that. I stood drying my face and looking at him through the rag towel.

"You sick?" He looked up and said no.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing. I told you that last night. What do you care anyway?"

"Mind your mouth, cellmate. They used to call me Killer back home. I tore a guy's arm off one time and beat him over the head with the bloody end of it. He was a little freak like you. He didn't excuse himself when he walked in front of me."

Crawley took all this noise calmly enough. He just sat there looking up at me with his muddy eyes and didn't say anything. It made me sore. I said, "I don't think I like you. See that crack in the floor? That one there. You stay on this side of it. Cross that line and I pop you. See?"

NOW that was a dirty trick; the running water was on "my" side of the line, and so was the cell door, where he'd have to go to get his eats. So was the bunk. He got up off the bunk clumsy-like, and crossed over to the window and stood with his back to it, looking at me. He didn't look scared and he didn't look sore and he didn't look sorry. He just watched me, quiet, obedient like a hound-dog, but all patient and hatred inside like a fat tabby-cat. I snorted and turned my back to him, grasping the grating, waiting for chow. Prison rules were that if a man didn't want to eat he didn't have to. If he didn't want to eat he wouldn't show up at the grating when the mess wagon came along his deck. If he was sick, there was a sick-call at ten o'clock. That was none of the trusty's business, the guy who pushed the wagon. He fed whoever was reaching through the bars with his square messkit and his tin cup and spoon.

So I hung out there, and Crawley was backed up against the other wall and I could feel his eyes on my back. My mind was clicking right along. Funny, though. Like —well, like this:

"I oughta get paid for having to bunk with a sideshow. By God I will get paid, too. I got two messkits, his and mine. *I can feel them eyes.* Here's one time I get four prunes and four pieces of bread and by golly enough prune-juice to really sweeten that lousy coffee. Hot dam—tomorrow's Wednesday. Two eggs instead of one! I'll starve the —— until he gets so weak an' sick they'll ship him out of here. Oh, boy —wait'll Sunday! Wait'll that misshapen cockroach has to watch me eatin' two lumps of ice cream! An' if he squeals I'll break his neck an' stuff it under his belt. *I can feel—two sets of eyes!*"

The wagon came. I stuck out one kit. A spoon of oatmeal and a dribble of watered, canned milk in one side; two prunes and juice in the other. Coffee in the cup. Two hunks of bread on the cup. I quickly stuck out the other kit. The trusty didn't even look. He filled up again and

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moved on. I backed away with a kit in each fist. I was afraid to turn around. There was one guy behind me and I could feel two pairs of eyes on my back. I spilled a couple of drops of coffee from my left hand and saw I was shaking. I stood there like a damn fool because I was afraid to turn around.

I said to myself, what the hell, he could not pull his finger out of a tub of lard and he's got you on the run. Put down the grub and walk on him. If you don't like his eyes, close 'em. Close all—I gulped—*four of them.*

Aw, this was silly. I went over to him and said, "Here," and gave him his messkit. I spooned a little oatmeal into his dish. I told him to go and sit on his bunk and eat. I showed him how to sweeten his coffee with prune-juice. I don't know why I did it. I don't know why I never reminded him again about the line. He didn't say a damn thing. Not even thanks.

I ATE and washed my kit before he was half through. He chewed enough for two people. I guess I knew from the start that there was more to him than just one guy. When he was done he sat there looking at me again. He put his kit on the floor beside him and then went and stood by the window. I was going to say something to him about it, but I figured I'd let him be.

It was raining, gloomy outside. That was lousy. On a clear day they let us in the yard for an hour in the afternoon. Rainy days we had a half-hour in the area under the cell-blocks. If you had money you could get candy and smokes and magazines. If you didn't have money you did without. I still had twenty cents. I was rolling my own, stretching it. Wasn't nobody going to bring me cash money. I was doing a little sixty-day stretch for something that doesn't matter very much, and if I watched it I could keep smoking until I was done here.

Well, anyway, on rainy days there's not much to do. You make your bunk. If you have a break, you can usually drag up something interesting to talk about with your cellmate. As long as your cell is halfway clean looking, it's okay, but they're all scrubbed bone-white and chrome-shiny because that's all there is to do. After I'd sat for an hour and a half smoking more than I could afford and trying to find something new to think about, I grabbed the bucket and brush and began to polish the floor. I made up my mind to do just half of it. That was a bright idea. When the guards came around inspecting for dirty cells at ten-thirty, one-half of this one would look crummy because the other half would be really scrubbed. That and Crawley's dirty messkit would get him into a nice jam. The guards knew by this time how I kept my cell.

Feeling almost happy at the idea, I turned to and began wearing out my knees and knuckles. I really bore down. When I came to the middle of the cell I went back and started over. I worked right up to Crawley's messkit. I stopped there. I picked it up and washed it and put it away. Crawley moved over to the clean half. I finished washing the floor. It certainly looked swell. All over. Ah, don't ask me why.

I put the gear away and sat down for a while. I tried to kid myself that I felt good because I'd shown that lazy monstrosity up. Then I realized I didn't feel good at all. What was he doing; pushing me around? I looked up and glared at him. He didn't say anything. I went on sitting. Hell with him. This was the pay-off. Why, I wouldn't even talk to him. Let him sit there and rot, the worthless accident.

After a while I said, "What's the rap?"

He looked up at me inquiringly. "What are you in for?" I asked again.

"Vag."

"No visible means of support, or no address?"

"Visible."

"What'd the man in black soak you?"

"I ain't seen him. I don't know how much it's good for."

"Oh; waiting trial, huh?"

"Yeah. Friday noon. I got to get out of here before that."

I laughed. "Got a lawyer?"

He shook his head.

"Listen," I told him, "you're not in here on somebody's complaint, you know. The county put you here and the county'll prosecute. They won't retract the charge to spring you. What's your bail?"

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"Three hundred."

"Have you got it?" I asked. He shook his head.

"Can you get it?"

"Not a chance."

"An' you 'got to get out of here'."

"I will."

"Not before Friday."

"Uh-huh. Before Friday. Tomorrow. Stick around; you'll see."

I LOOKED at him, his toothpick arms and legs. "Nobody ever broke this jail and it's forty-two years old. I'm six foot three an' two-twenty soaking wet, an' I wouldn't try it. What chance you got?"

He said again, "Stick around."

I sat and thought about that for a while. I could hardly believe it. The man couldn't lift his own weight off the floor. He had no more punch than a bedbug, and a lot less courage. And he was going to break this jail, with its twelve-foot walls and its case-hardened steel bars! Sure, I'd stick around.

"You're as dumb as you look," I said. "In the first place, it's dumb to even dream about cracking this bastille. In the second place, it's dumb not to wait for your trial, take your rap—it won't be more than sixty—and then get out of here clean."

"You're wrong," he said. There was an urgency about his strange, groaning voice. "I'm waiting trial. They haven't mugged me or printed me or given me an examination. If they convict me—and they will if I ever go to court—they'll give me a physical. Any doc—even a prison doc—would give his eyeteeth to X-ray me." He tapped his monstrous chest. "I'll never get away from them if they see the plates."

"What's your trouble?"

"It's no trouble. It's the way I am."

"How are you?"

"Fine. How are you?"

Okay, so it was none of my business. I shut up. But I was astonished at that long spiel of his. I didn't know he could talk that much.

Lunch came and went, and he got his share and, in spite of myself, a little more. Nothing much was said; Crawley just didn't seem to be interested in anything that went on around him. You'd think a guy whose trial is coming up would worry about it. You'd think a guy who was planning a jail-break would worry about it. Not Crawley. He just sat and waited for the time to come. Damn if I didn't do all his fretting for him!

At two o'clock the bolts shot back. I said, "Come on, Crawley. We got a chance to stretch our legs in the area. If you got any money you can buy something to read or smoke."

Crawley said, "I'm okay here. Besides, I got no money. They sell candy?"

"Yeah."

"You got money?"

"Yep. Twenty cents. Tobacco for me for another two weeks at the rate of two or three home-made cigarettes per day. There ain't one penny for anyone or anything else."

"Hell with that. Bring back four candy bars. Two marshmallow, one coconut, one fudge."

I LAUGHED in his face and went out, thinking that here was one time when I'd have a story to tell the rest of the boys that would keep a lifer laughing. But somehow I never did get a chance to say anything to anybody about Crawley. I couldn't tell you how it happened. I started to talk to one fellow and the guard called him over. I said howdy to another and he told me to dry up; he had some blues he wanted to soak in. It just didn't work out. Once I really thought I had a start—one of the stoolies, this time; but just as I said, "Hey, you ought to get a load of my cell-mate," the bell rang for us to get back in the cells. I just had time to get to the prison store before the shutter banged down over the counter. I went back up to my deck and into my cell. I pitched Crawley his candy bars. He took them without saying aye, yes, or no—or thanks.

Hardly a word passed between us until long after supper. He wanted to know how to fix one blanket so it felt like two. I showed him. Then I hopped into the upper bunk and said:

"Try sleepin' tonight."

He said, "What's the matter with you?"

"You was talking in your sleep last night."

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"I wasn't talking to myself," he said defensively.

"You sure wasn't talking to me."

"I was talking to—my brother," said Crawley, and he laughed. My God, what a laugh that was. It was sort of dragged out of him, and it was grating and high-pitched and muffled and it went on and on. I looked over the edge of the bunk, thinking maybe he wasn't laughing, maybe he was having a fit. His face was strained, his eyes were screwed shut. All right, but his mouth was shut. His lips were clamped tight together. *His mouth was shut* and he went on laughing! He was laughing from inside somewhere, from his chest, some way I never even heard of before. I couldn't stand it. If that laughing didn't stop right away I'd have to stop breathing. My heart would stop breathing. My life was squirting out through my pores, turning to sweat. The laughter went higher and higher, just as loud, just as shrill, and I knew I could hear it and Crawley could, but no one else. It went up and up until I stopped hearing it, but even then I knew it was still going on and up, and though I couldn't hear it any more, I knew when it stopped. My back teeth ached from the way my jaws had driven them into the gums. I think I passed out, and then slept afterwards. I don't remember the lights going out at nine, or the guards checking up.

I been slugged before, many a time, and I know what it's like to come to after being knocked out. But when I came out of this it was more like waking up, so I must have slept. Anyway, it wasn't morning. Must have been about three or four, before the sun came up. There was a weak moon hanging around outside the old walls, poking a gray finger in at us, me and Crawley. I didn't move for a few minutes, and I heard Crawley talking. And I heard someone else answering.

CRAWLEY was saying something about money. "We got to get money, Bub. This is a hell of a jam. We thought we didn't need it. We could get anything we wanted without it. See what happened? Just because I'm no beauty winner a cop asks us questions. They stick us in here. Now we've got to break it. Oh, we can do it; but if we get some money it don't have to happen again. You can figure something, can't you, Bub?"

And then came the answering voice. It was the grating one that had been laughing before. That wasn't Crawley's voice! That belonged to somebody else. Aw, that was foolish. Two men to a cell. One man to a bunk. But here were two men talking, and I wasn't saying anything. I suddenly had a feeling my brains were bubbling like an egg frying in too much grease.

The voice shrilled, "Oh, sure. Money's no trouble to get. Not the way we work, Crawley! He, he!" They laughed together. My blood felt so cold I was afraid to move in case my veins broke. The voice went on, "About this break; you know just what we're going to do?"

"Yeh," said Crawley. "Gee, Bub, I'd sure be wuthless without you. Man, what a brain, what a brain!"

The voice said, "You don't have to do without me! Heh! Just you try and get rid of me!"

I took a deep, quiet breath and slowly raised up and hung my head over the edge of the bunk so I could see. I couldn't be scared any more. I couldn't be shocked any more. After seeing that, I was through. A guy lives all his life for a certain moment. Like that little old doc that delivered the quints. He never did anything like it before. He never will again. From then on he was through. Like a detective in a book solving a crime. It all leads up to one thing—who done it. When the dick finds that out, he's through. The book's finished. Like me; I was finished when I saw Crawley's brother. That was the high point.

Yeah, it was his brother. Crawley was twins. Like them Siamese twins, but one was big and the other was small. Like a baby. There was only the top part of him, and he was growing out of Crawley's chest. But that oversize chest was just built for the little one to hide in. It folded around the little one. It was hinged like I said before, something like a clamshell. My God!

I said it was like a baby. I meant just small like that. It wasn't baby stuff, aside from that. The head was shaggy, tight-curled. The face was long and lean with

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smooth, heavy eyebrows. The skin was very dark, and there was little crooked fangs on each side of the mouth, two up, two down. The ears were just a little pointed. That thing had sense of its own, and it was bad clear through. I mean really bad. That thing was all Crawley's crime-brains. Crawley was just a smart mule to that thing. He carried it around with him and he did what it wanted him to do. Crawley obeyed that brother of his—and so did *everybody else!* I did. My tobacco money; cleaning the cell; seeing that Crawley got fed—that was all the little twin's doing, all of it. It wasn't my fault. Nobody *ever* pushed me around like that before!

Then it saw me. It had thrown its hideous little head back to laugh, and it flung up a withered little arm and piped. "You! Go to sleep! *Now!*" So—I did.

I DON'T know how it happened. If I'd slept all that time the bulls would have taken me to the ward. But so help me, from that time until two o'clock I don't know what happened. The Crawley twins kept me fogged, I guess. But I must have gotten dressed and washed; I must have eaten, and I'll guarantee that the Crawleys didn't wash no mess-kits. Anyhow, the next thing I remember is the bolt shooting back on the cell door. Crawley came up behind me as I stood there looking at it, and I felt his eyes on my back. Four eyes. He said:

"Go on. What are you waiting for?"

I said: "You've done something to me. What is it?"

He just said, "Get going."

We walked out together, out along the deck and down two long flights of iron stairs to the area. We took maybe fifteen, maybe twenty steps, and then Crawley whispered, *"Now!"*

I was loaded with H. E. I was primed and capped, and the firing pin of his voice stung me. I went off like that. There were two guards in front of me. I took them by their necks and cracked their heads together so powerfully that their skulls seemed soft. I screamed and turned and bounded up the stairs, laughing and shouting. Prisoners scattered. A guard grabbed at me on the first landing. I picked him up and threw him over my shoulder and ran upward. A gun blammed twice, and each bullet went *thuck!* as it bored into the body of the bull I carried. He snatched at the railing as I ran and I heard the bones in his wrist crackle. I pitched him over the rail and he landed on another guard down there in the area. The other guard was drawing a bead on me and when the body struck him his gun went off. The slug ricocheted from the steps and flew into the mouth of a prisoner on the second deck. I was screaming much louder than he was. I reached the third deck and ran around the cell-block chattering and giggling. I slid to a stop and threw my legs over the railing and sat there swinging my feet. Two cops opened fire on me. Their aim was lousy because only three out of the twelve bullets hit me. I stood on the lower rail and leaned my calves against the upper one and spread out my arms and shouted at them, cursing them with my mouth full of blood. The prisoners were being herded six and eight to a cell; down on the area level. The guards in the area suddenly stood aside, making way like courtiers for the royalty of a man with a submachine gun. The gun began singing to me. It was a serenade to a giant on a balcony, by a grizzled troubadour with a deep-toned instrument. I couldn't resist that music for more than a moment, so I came down to the area, turning over and over in the air, laughing and coughing and sobbing as I fell.

You watched me, didn't you, you flat-footed blockheads? You got out your guns and ran from the doors, from the series of searching rooms, booking rooms, desk rooms, bull-pens? You left the doors open when you ran? Crawley's out in the street now. No hurry for Crawley. Crawley gives the orders wherever he is. There'll be others—like me.

I've done work for Crawley. See me now? And—Crawley didn't even say, "Thanks."

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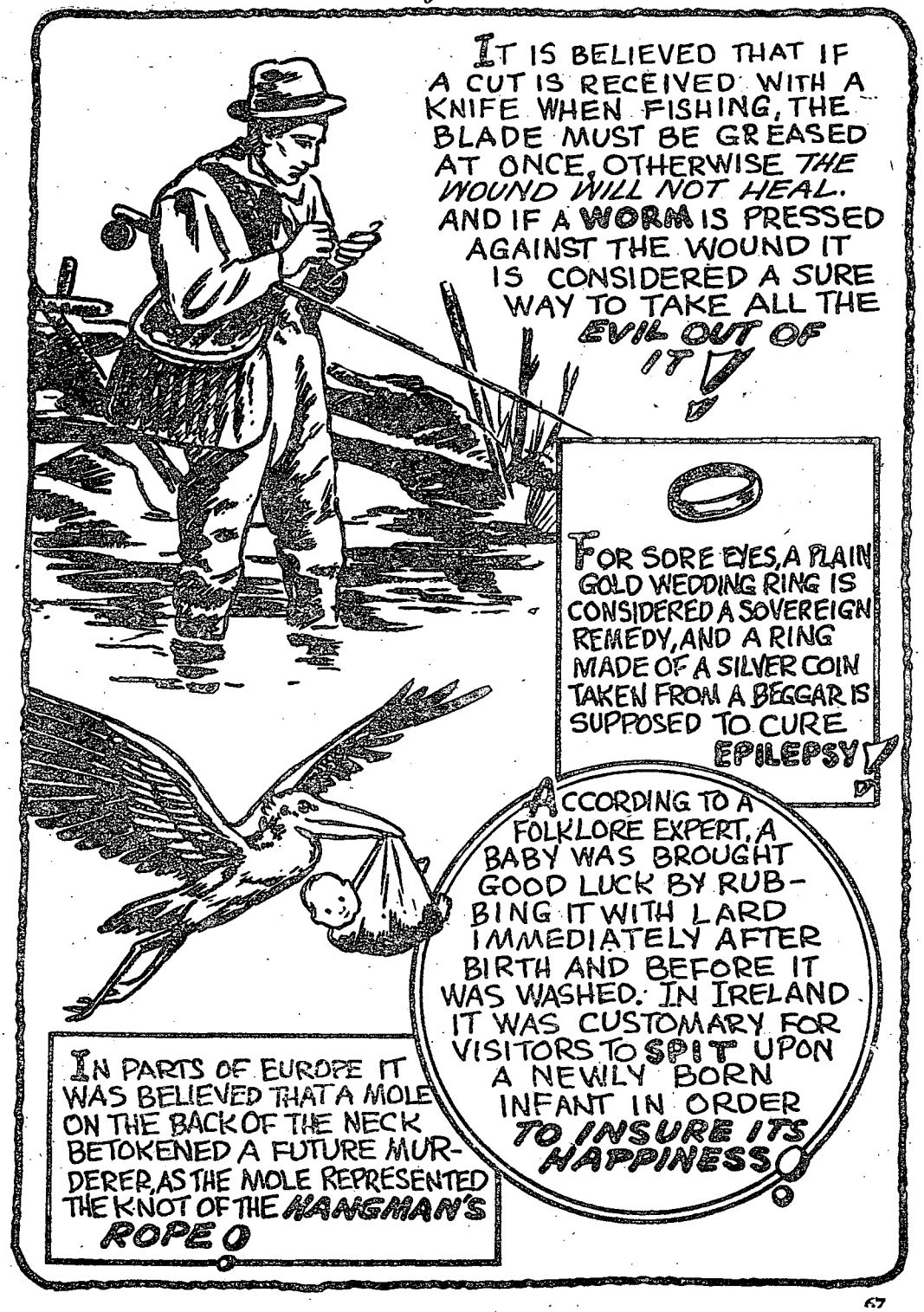
Superstitions and Taboos

By Weill



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Shadow of Melas

"MR. TRESCOT will see you in a moment," announced Reddington, Edmund Trescot's servant, to the two visitors after taking their things. "Who shall I say is here?"

"Dr. Cheney," replied the larger man, loudly and crisply.

Surprise showed on Reddington's face, and in his march to the door he hesitated to give the caller a more scrutinizing look. The short and stout physician, whose red hair rimmed a huge bald spot over a bulldoggish face incongruously pink, returned the servant's gaze with a morose glare.

"And the other gentleman?" spoke the servant, shifting his eyes to the small plain man at the doctor's side. Reddington had plainly taken new interest in the callers.

The small man began to open his mouth, but Dr. Cheney interrupted:

"Just tell Trescot that Dr. Cheney has someone with him!"

The servant nodded and left.

Presently a high narrow door was opened. The man who entered tilted his head slightly although the door was six feet high. His face was long. His nose and mouth were enclosed in deep curved lines like long parentheses. A thick lock of his partially gray hair hung over his high and straight forehead. His lips, thin on a broad mouth, turned slightly up with a hint of friendliness. He walked toward his callers with leisurely, Lincoln-like dignity.

"Dr. Cheney!" he greeted with a low cordial voice and a gesture of surprise. Trescot held out his hand. "Of all the places I would expect to see you, this is the last!"

The stout little doctor put out his hand and remained seated. "Let me assure you," he said unsmilingly, "that I never anticipated such an occasion either, Trescot! But this is most urgent or I shouldn't have imposed on you."

"It's no imposition, Dr. Cheney!" He turned smilingly toward the other man and held out his hand without waiting for an introduction. The small plain man rose courteously.

"This," said Dr. Cheney, "is Paul Preston, my patient."

"Happy to meet you, Mr. Preston," said Trescot, backing up to an armchair and sitting in it. "Coming here must have been a last resort, Doctor. Be seated, Mr. Preston."

"Frankly, it is!" snapped the doctor.

"I'm anxious to hear about it," spoke Trescot calmly, offering them cigarettes. Cheney preferred a cigar from his own pocket. Trescot's eyes moved back and forth slowly between his two callers, recording a steady stream of details. Both men, he noticed, were highly nervous, but in different ways. He knew that Dr. Cheney's nervousness was due to embarrassment. But Preston's was for some other reason. He sensed that the man had a problem, one that had completely unnerved him, for his physiognomy didn't reveal a man normally of nervous type.

Trescot snapped open his lighter and held it for the two men in turn, an opportunity he often took to study faces that were briefly off guard. Then, as he held the lighter to his own cigarette he said casually:

"After the way you treated me in the Middleton case, flaring at me, accusing me of interfering, or I believe you said *bungling things with my metaphysical theories*, wasn't that it? I never expected to see you find your way voluntarily to my home." He blew out a stream of smoke and returned the lighter to his vest pocket. "Even although," he added with a twinkle, "my ideas were finally proved justified."

DR. CHENEY looked down and fumbled with his watch chain. "So far as I'm concerned," he grumbled, "the case you speak of has never been satisfactorily explained. However," he cleared his throat

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BY ROGER S. VREELAND

Strange illnesses demand strange treatments—administered by a strange kind of doctor!

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and looked up, "I hope you've enjoyed rubbing it in. Perhaps you can gloat a little further when you see I am forced to come to you on another matter. Not really forced," he added hastily, "but, well, persuaded by my judgment!"

Trescot offered a humble smile. "Of course, of course!" he said. "I don't mean to embarrass you! And this matter you speak of? If I can lend aid to a good cause, you know I am ready—always ready!"

Dr. Cheney leaned forward and rubbed his hands together. "All right, Trescot. The problem is Mr. Preston's. Let him tell it himself."

Trescot turned a serious face to Preston. "Please relax," he urged. "Consider me a friend. Take your time and consider no detail too insignificant to mention."

Preston's mild eyes leveled on Trescot's, and his lips quivered a moment before he spoke.

"It's about my wife," he began. "Helen and I have been married twelve years—have no children, but we're happy. Ten days ago she became ill. She had lost a garnet necklace—just a trinket, but she'd cherished it a long time. This seemed to start a nervous upset. My wife has always been vivacious, unaccustomed to moody spells. In company she was usually the life of the party. But after losing the necklace she seemed almost despondent. The next day she refused to get out of bed. In fact, she hasn't been out of bed since."

AS PRESTON spoke his words continued faster. But now he stopped for a breath. Trescot began keeping track of the questions he would ask later.

"Dr. Cheney has been our family physician ever since we were married," continued Preston. "As a matter of fact, however, we've needed his services very little. But when I saw Helen remaining in bed, growing sullen, losing interest in everything, hardly speaking, in fact, and often just staring, I naturally called the Doctor. At first he told me not to worry, that it was merely a case of distraught nerves, an accumulative effect which overtook her normal nerve stability, and set off by having lost the necklace. But she kept getting worse. When Dr. Cheney saw she wasn't eating he urged me to get a nurse, more to feed her than anything."

He stopped while he snuffed out his cigarette.

"It was on the third day after she had taken ill," continued Preston, "that I first noticed a peculiar change. With real alarm I called Dr. Cheney. She. . . . she . . . . . she. . . !"

Stammering and choking, he stopped.

Dr. Cheney cleared his throat to speak, but Trescot held up his hand.

"What you were about to tell me," said Trescot, "was that an apparent physical change was taking place. Is that right?"

Preston's face was buried in his hands.

"That *is* right," Cheney said distastefully, evading Trescot's eyes. "I know what you are thinking. Ordinarily I would have scoffed at it. But when one faces a thing he has never believed in, he is forced, if honest with himself, to consult someone who does believe in it."

He raised his pink bulldog face finally to meet Trescot's eyes.

"I am not convinced of anything, you understand," concluded Cheney, "but I am ready to concede that I'd like your opinion."

"Frankly, Cheney," said Trescot, "that is more than I expected of you. Let's not waste time. Take me to Mrs. Preston at once. I'll get my things."

Twenty minutes later Dr. Cheney and Preston led Edmund Trescot into a bedroom of Preston's two-story house on a shady street of the suburbs. As they passed the nurse, a solid Irish woman who looked to Trescot professionally experienced, he noticed how frightened she seemed.

Dr. Cheney asked her: "Any change?"

She shook her head gravely. "Only for the worse, I'm afraid."

They entered the room. The physician and husband stepped aside to let Trescot approach the bedside first. The tall student of psychic sciences walked slowly, erectly across the room and stared down at the patient. He felt his heart beat a little faster despite his experience in such matters. Nervously he pushed away the thick lock that hung over his forehead, unmindful that it fell right back. First he noticed the woman's strange pallor, its grayish tint; then he noticed the drawn tightness of her lips, and the narrow

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separation through which her teeth almost gleamed. Trescot had been told that Mrs. Preston had attractive features, but her nose certainly was unhandsomely small. Her eyes were barely open, but through the slits he saw them shift slightly, as though watching him. He listened to her breath. It was regular but a little too fast.

SUDDENLY Preston rushed to Trescot's side, his shaking hand grasping the scientist's arm. "My God!" he cried. "Look at her hair! It's turning gray! It's . . ." He stopped suddenly as though afraid she heard him. He dropped emotionally to his knees. "Oh, Helen, what is the matter! Why don't you speak?"

Trescot turned to Dr. Cheney and gestured to take Preston away. The nurse and doctor took the husband's arms and led him out of the room. Trescot continued to study the woman. An ear projected through her hair. It had lost its normal stiffness and drooped like an animal's. He noticed other details. There was no trace of pores in her skin.

A few minutes later he joined Cheney and Preston downstairs.

"We must act quickly," said Trescot gravely. "I'll have to cover a lot of ground in a short time to save her."

"What do you think. . . ." began Dr. Cheney.

"At this stage," interrupted Trescot, "please let me ask the questions. First, Preston, which of your close neighbors do you know best."

"We are friendly with the Thorntons across the street," he answered.

"Good. I'll ask you to introduce me before we leave. There are several things I'll have to ask of you. First, please dismiss the nurse immediately. Food for Mrs. Preston is useless. I can tell you that she won't eat. Second, you also must leave. You will take a room in my home in order to be available in case I need you. Go to work as usual, but don't in any circumstances go near your home. No matter how difficult this may seem, it is vitally important. Now, please tell me something about your wife. Are her parents living, if so, where? And where did you meet her?"

"I can't tell you who her parents were," Preston replied. "She was an orphan, brought up by relatives whom she has persistently refused to discuss with me."

"Then where did you meet her?"

Preston's face reddened. "That is a thing I have never told anyone," he said, flustered. "It's a thing she and I have held secret for twelve years. The truth is I found her on the sidewalk. She had just come from the stage entrance of a cheap theater. She was alone. She had fainted, collapsed on the sidewalk. Just a weary burlesque girl. There were but few people on the street, none in the immediate spot except myself. I picked her up, put her in a taxi and took her to a doctor's. She never went back to the theater. At first she tried to refuse help from me. I saw that she was essentially clean, good, and beautiful. I fell in love with her. We've stayed in love and been happy ever since."

"Good," said Trescot, his eyes searching Preston's with sympathetic concern. "Try to remember now," he said, "if she wore any jewelry when you found her twelve years ago."

Preston replied unhesitantly. "Yes. She wore the garnet pendant I spoke of—the one she lost. Incidentally, when she came to in the taxi the first thing she did was put her hand to her breast to feel if it were there. The garnet was not of the usual variety. It was yellow, and encased by a simple silver frame."

Trescot's eye narrowed. "She even wore it in her sleep, didn't she?"

Preston looked at Trescot with surprise and Dr. Cheney put his hand to his chin and squinted up at the tall scholar he had recently scoffed at.

"Yes," said Preston. "Helen *always* wore it. If it wasn't in sight it would be under her dress. I used to joke about it, lightly reprimand her, accuse her of letting it become a fetish."

"Isn't there one detail about the garnet you haven't mentioned?" asked Trescot.

"You mean the engraving on the back?"

"Yes."

"I know there is some kind of ornament or symbol, but frankly I never gave it much attention."

"Very well. Now, you say the garnet was lost. Are you very sure it wasn't stolen?"

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"No, I can't be sure," admitted Preston. "Our lodge had held a ladies' night. It was on the way home she missed it. We notified the lodge officers to be on the lookout, but since they didn't find it or have it turned in to them, we assumed it was lost along the street. We searched every place we could think of. You know how it is. A passerby sees a thing like that and picks it up."

"Do you recall all the men your wife danced with that night?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Were they all men you know well, feel you could trust?"

"No, there was a stranger, come to think of it. A shaggy-haired fellow, although he was dressed well. No one seemed to know him. Helen mentioned how clumsy he was."

"Any way of checking him?"

"I doubt it. I heard the secretary ask who he was, and someone said we were getting too careless about gate-crashers."

Trescot frowned. "There is the beginning of the trail," he said. "But unfortunately it's blocked at the beginning."

"You mean," asked Preston, "there is some relation between the necklace and Helen's sickness."

"Definitely."

Dr. Cheney pushed out his lower lip skeptically, but remained silent.

Trescot laid his hand on Preston's shoulder. "You may as well know this," he said. "Your wife's normal existence has for a long time depended upon wearing the yellow garnet. It was more than a mere obsession with her. It may sound silly to you, but she, at least, knew how important it was. Obviously the reason she didn't confide this in you was because she didn't expect you to believe it."

PRESTON introduced Trescot to his friends the Thorntons. The psychic knew Preston was curious as to the reason for this, but he took no more time to explain things. Preston promised him to dismiss the nurse and leave within the hour for Trescot's house. Dr. Cheney went his way too. He had patients to visit.

The metaphysician had many things on his mind to do. After phoning Reddington to arrange accommodations for Preston he started about them. One was a conference with the Thorntons. Part of what he told them was fictitious, for he knew that there were times when the statement of facts was unwise. He said he was a detective, that the Prestons were in trouble, and then he made specific requests. They were anxious to cooperate.

Trescot seemed then to drop from view. The next day Cheney tried to reach him but no one could say where he was. Finally Cheney was handed a small envelope by his secretary who said it had been delivered by messenger. The note, signed by Trescot, read: SEE ME TONIGHT, 8:30, at 417 GREENWOOD PLACE. ASK FOR GEORGE GIBBS.

When the rotund, red-haired doctor arrived he found it to be the home of the Thorntons. He rang the bell.

"I would like to see Mr. Gibbs," said Dr. Cheney to Mrs. Thornton. She smiled nervously, directed him upstairs, and told him to knock on the first door at the right.

To Cheney's surprise a short stranger with heavy mustache, a round face, and horn-rimmed glasses opened the door.

"I thought this was Mr. Gibbs' room," grunted the doctor.

"This is Mr. Gibbs," spoke the man gutturally. "Come in, Dr. Cheney."

"Oh!" said Cheney, surprised.

"Perhaps," said Gibbs, "if I use my natural voice, remove these glasses, and stand at my natural height you will recognize me. But I shan't go to the trouble of removing my make-up and mustache!"

For an instant Cheney resented being so completely deceived, but he chuckled it off.

"If it fooled you it must be all right," Trescot said with a trace of humor. "Sit down, Doctor. I called you here because you are entitled to know what I am doing. Also, because I'd like you to witness some of the things you haven't believed in. And finally, to ask if you'd like to take part."

Cheney handed him a cigar and they lighted.

"As you see," continued Trescot, "this is a front bedroom offering a clear view of the Preston home across the street. Mrs. Preston is still there. She is alone and will remain so for a few days."

Dr. Cheney's big pink face was solemn and attentive. Trescot had paused and the

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doctor took the chance to speak what was on his own mind:

"Trescot," he said, "I hope you realize that I can't afford to allow you indefinite time. If it should get out that I have consulted you in a case I'd be ostracized immediately. As you undoubtedly know, most medical men consider you a charlatan. It's only after having seen with my own eyes the characteristics manifested in Mrs. Preston that I turned to you."

"Then let me be frank with you too," said the temporary George Gibbs. "I don't expect to do anything for four days at least. It will be three days before the metastasis is complete. There is no doubt in my mind that Mrs. Preston is a victim of lycanthropia, and not the usual variety. It is the *Melasite* lycanthropia, which means that the transformation is permanent, regardless of lunar phases, and sometimes takes place over an extended period. Whether the garnet necklace was an actual protection or one induced by auto-suggestion, the power of which few people fully realize, is a side issue at present. I am convinced that there is nothing to do now but let the disease, if you wish to call it that, run its full course. It's always dangerous to meddle with a lycanthrope during the metastatic period anyhow."

"You mean," put in the doctor, "that you are calling the patient a lycanthrope?"

"Precisely."

"If I know my Greek that is a very unpleasant, shall I say *tabu word,* among intelligent, intellectual people. In other words, *werewolf!*"

"In other words *werewolf!* You see now why I was so anxious to keep Preston away from his wife, and to get rid of the nurse."

"What are you going to do?"

"Just wait here, for the present, and watch. This is Tuesday. Friday night the moon will become full. I am not leaving the house. Mrs. Thornton is bringing me food. My car is parked in the back of the house, ready for instant use. My disguise, obviously, is for protection. The Melasites have a representative in this section. That is a fact I have known for some time. Through underground sources I have learned a great deal about the Melasites, but there is still more—much more—of which I am in ignorance."

Edmund Trescot, alias George Gibbs, who like his father before him, profound and enlightened student of the occult and all the phases of psychic phenomena, adjusted his fake horn-rimmed glasses and fingered his false mustache.

"How do they appear, Doctor? Do they go with my face?"

"They fooled me!" snorted Cheney. "But I'd like to know how you got that round face and reddish complexion!"

"Just a little make-up and some plastic fittings under my cheeks," laughed Trescot.

Turning serious again, he said: "I have even learned the name of the Melasite representative here and a little about him. His name is Nehemiah Casswood. He has a broad, bony face with a nose like an owl's beak, and his hair is gray and shaggy. That ties in partly with what Preston said of the stranger at his lodge.

"But," continued Trescot, "I've never succeeded in finding out just where Nehemiah Casswood lives. So this Preston case may open a long-sought opportunity to me. I'm hoping to kill two birds with one stone. Save Mrs. Preston and locate Nehemiah Casswood. Discovery of the Melasites was one of my father's great ambitions, an ambition he passed on to me. I doubt, Doctor, if you know who these Melasites are. Few people do, and fewer yet are aware of the potential danger our entire society is in from them."

"You are right, Trescot," admitted Cheney with open curiosity. "I don't know what you mean by the Melasites."

"I haven't time to go into detail now," Trescot said, getting up, parting the curtains a bare two inches for a prying glimpse across the street. "Besides, you can hardly expect me to make a confidant of you. Let this much suffice. Salem's curse lives on. The Melasites are descendants of a mysterious band which fled from Salem under cover in 1692 at the beginning of the witchcraft trials. They settled in a remote New England valley not so much to protect themselves as to protect the knowledge and potential power they had acquired. They call their place Melas. In the Realm of Darkness, you know, forms, rites, names, all things from the world of Light, are in

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opposite. Melas is the reverse spelling of the place they came from—Salem. There in Melas they still carry on their own development of witchcraft, certain phases of which seem to be uniquely their own.

Trescot faced the doctor. "This business will be exceedingly dangerous, Dr. Cheney. If you wish to be with me Friday night I'd be glad to have you. The things you *might* see would be much more convincing than my telling you of them afterward. But I hold no certainty of success. Do you wish to join me?"

"Of course I will!" snapped the doctor decidedly.

"Then be here early in the evening, between seven and seven-thirty. So, if you please, I'll say good-by until Friday."

THURSDAY night, a little after midnight, Edmund Trescot, still in his disguise as George Gibbs, slipped out of the Thornton house onto the street. The soles of his shoes were padded. The moon, already past zenith, was still in the first quarter, but with the thick foliage of Greenwood Place its light reached the ground only in patches. He walked up the sidewalk to the end of the block and crossed the street. He paused and looked around. A few lights were still burning, but there were no cars nor pedestrians in sight. He walked leisurely back, now, on the opposite side, until he reached the Preston home. Here he paused again; looked around. Still no one was in sight, so he turned up the walk. Shrubs and trees hid him immediately from the street light. He mounted the porch steps cautiously, silently. The house was in complete darkness except for a patch of moonlight that fell on the second-story front, on the window of the bedroom where Mrs. Preston lay.

Gently Trescot tried the door. Satisfied that it was locked, he took the key Preston had given him and turned the lock, turned the knob, slowly pressed the door open and waited for his eyes to become accustomed to the greater darkness. When he discerned the outline of the staircase he mounted slowly. He was arrested just before reaching the top by the sound of heavy breathing. He knew now that Mrs. Preston was still living. Keeping close to the walls, he approached her door. It was open about six inches. He looked in. Moonlight shone on her bed—on her! Trescot caught his breath—clapped his hand over his mouth lest he involuntarily utter a sound. He clutched the door jamb to steady himself. . . .

A few seconds later he was back in his room at the Thorntons'. He tried to relax in his chair, but his limbs were still shaking. His forehead was still beaded with perspiration. He took an aspirin and addressed himself in thought. *With all my experience there are some sights which I guess I'll never be able to face calmly!*

THE next night Dr. Cheney arrived at Trescot's room per schedule. Trescot still wore his disguise.

"I stopped at your house this afternoon and saw Preston," announced Dr. Cheney. "I told him to be sure to remain there and try to be calm, that the crisis was tonight."

"Yes," replied Trescot, "I know. I keep in touch with Reddington over the Thorntons' phone."

"Preston has implicit faith in you, Trescot."

"Thank you for telling me, but it's really no compliment. Not when you stop to think that persons in situations like his will put their confidence in anyone who gives them hope. I suggest now that we go down the back way and get in my car." He picked up a cane which he said helped him to walk with a more natural stoop, turned out the light and led the way. The driveway was on a slight grade. They pushed the car until it was in a shadow even with the front of the house. They got in, Trescot behind the wheel.

"From here," explained Trescot, "we have a good view and can make a quick start, but we must keep our voices low and strike no matches. The Thorntons know we're here. They're keeping out of our way."

During the first half-hour of their vigil several cars passed in both directions. The full moon's light was already tinging the treetops. A black sedan, a model about five years old, was passing. Trescot said, "This is the third time that car has passed in the same direction. Wouldn't be surprised if

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our man were in it." In the darkness it was impossible to make out the driver.

The wait was long and monotonous. By eleven-thirty the moon was high and bright. The suspicious sedan had passed several times more. The last time it had slowed up.

A shattering of glass from across the street gave them a start. The monotony was over. A low, unholy moan trembled the air. Both men sat alert, watching. After several moments they saw something move among the shadows of the Preston lawn.

"It looks like a dog," whispered Cheney.

An animal slinked into the light, its tail drooping, its head low.

Trescot murmured: "Yes, like a big police dog."

"Like . . . !" began Cheney, but he didn't finish.

The animal turned up the street, slinking along a hedge.

"Here comes that car again!" said Trescot.

The familiar sedan moved slowly this time. It pulled near the curb by the hedge, and stopped. They heard a door click open —slam shut. And the car started off.

Trescot released his handbrake, turned on the ignition. The car rolled out on the street. He put it in gear. The motor began a soft purr and he pressed gently on the gas pedal.

"We're going to follow now," he said, "and if possible I won't use any lights."

"Good!" mumbled Cheney. He bent low to hide the match while he lighted a cigar.

Following the car from an unsuspicious distance was easy. It took a direct course toward the outskirts of town, and traffic was light. In the country the moonlight was spread out over the entire scene and Trescot lagged back considerably.

"Unless he suspects being followed he isn't likely to see us," said Trescot. "But I won't take a chance."

Dr. Cheney puffed on his cigar in silent approval.

It was seven or eight miles, well into the hills, before the sedan turned off. At first it looked as if it had turned right into a woods, but when they reached the point they saw that it was a narrow lane that twisted through a stretch of trees and bushes. They also could see, bright in the moonlight, a quarter of a mile away, the house to which it led. It was on a high spot overlooking the valley.

"That's the old Turner home," said Cheney. "Didn't know anyone was living there."

Trescot stopped the car. "Know anything about it?"

"Well, George Turner, the grandfather, was a patient of mine about fifteen years ago. When he died his son tried to carry on as a country gentleman for a few years, then he sold the place—I never did know to whom. But so far as I have seen the few times I've driven by here it's been vacant. Anyway, it hasn't been kept up."

Soon they saw the lights of the car emerge from the woods and climb toward the house.

"Let's start in now," said Trescot, lifting his foot off the clutch and turning the wheels. The trees were so dense that the moonlight reached the ground only in spots. But now more than ever they didn't dare use the lights, so they crawled slowly in low gear to keep from going off the road.

WHEN they reached the clearing near the house they stopped, turned the car around, and got out. Trescot reached back for his cane. They stood facing the house from the side. A light now shined through yellow shades of one of the lower rooms. They saw the car they'd been following parked in a doorless garage attached to the back of the house.

The house was white, colonial, with square pillars in the front. The barns and sheds, as revealed in the lunar sheen, were well on the road to delapidation, though the house itself looked in better shape. They approached it from the side, then followed a path around to the front. Together they mounted the full-length porch, bare but for a few chairs. The lighted room was on the corner to the right of the entrance, but a yellow shade also covered the front window.

Trescot knocked on the door. They heard a scuffling noise from the lighted room, followed by the whine of a beast. Then a man's deep voice as though in answer to it. Next a moment of complete silence. Trescot knocked again. They

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could hear a door within being opened, and the sound of approaching steps. Trescot posed his cane and assumed a stooped posture.

The steps seemed to hesitate. Trescot turned suddenly to Cheney and whispered: "Take this." He pressed something into his hand. "I think it'll be better for you to step aside. Keep in the shadow. Don't come until I call you!"

Cheney fingered the small pistol he was now holding, obediently slid along the wall of the porch, and crouched behind a high-backed rocker. The plump physician was a bit clumsy, but his pomposity was gone. He was prompt and unquestioning.

"Don't use it," added Trescot, "except in extreme emergency."

Trescot knocked again.

The door opened suddenly and Trescot faced a man almost as tall as his normal self. The hall was lighted dimly. Trescot recognized the shaggy hair and bony features of Nehemiah Casswood.

"Good evening," greeted Trescot, "I'm sorry to bother you at such a late hour, but I've had a motor accident and would like to use your phone."

"That's an overused story-book idea!" said Nehemiah Casswood. "Come right in, Mr. Trescot!"

Trescot was startled and chagrined at sound of his name, but he decided not to abandon the pose yet.

"I'm afraid you've mistaken me," he said, stepping across the sill. "My name is George Gibbs."

Nehemiah Casswood stepped back and closed the door. "It doesn't make any difference. Come right into my—well, I call it my living room though there's not much furniture in it."

Trescot followed Casswood into the room they had seen lighted through the yellow shades. Casswood hadn't exaggerated about the furniture. There was a table holding a row of bottles, test tubes, and crucibles; and two chairs. A closed door at the back end led supposedly to another room.

The two men examined each other more carefully now that they were in a bright light. Casswood said: "Don't waste your time pretending with me, Trescot. You may as well stand up straight and throw away your cane. I knew you'd show up some time. I knew you were called in on Mrs. Preston." He stepped to the door through which they had just entered, turned a key and took it out. "As a matter of fact," continued Nehemiah Casswood, "I'm entirely prepared for you. I have a potency test ready which I'd like to try out. You'll make an excellent—shall I say, first victim? It'll be a sort of premiere, you know."

Trescot was not so frightened as he was chafed. He had believed Casswood was not directly aware of him. To maintain concealment of his identity he had gone to a lot of trouble in disguising himself. And Casswood obviously was still another step ahead of him, because until this moment Trescot had never been quite sure who Casswood was.

THE metaphysician studied the man before him calmly. Here at last was Nehemiah Casswood, an arch enemy; the only Melasite he had ever definitely identified; the one certain clue to the evil force upon which he was determined to focus the whole power of his life's study and experience—combined with what his father had left him—upon the banishment of the Melasites. He dared not organize followers against them. He must work alone, or with one or two accomplices at most. The few people who were aware of the Melasites were too fearful to take up cudgels with him anyway. Perhaps, though, if he lived through this experience, he would have Dr. Cheney on his side. Cheney was clumsy, but intelligent, and his background of medicine and dabblings in ancient alchemy, though purely a hobby with him, could prove very useful.

The owl-faced, gray, shaggy-haired Nehemiah Casswood stood watching him, waiting for him to speak. His body was thin, tall, his head large. His eyes too were large, eyebrows bushy, and his small hooked nose polished. The breadth between his cheekbones added a look of menace to his features.

Finally Trescot spoke. As he did so he straightened to his full height, a trifle over Casswood's. He held on to his cane.

"All right," declared the occult student, "*point one*, you win. I am Edmund Trescot. You are Nehemiah Casswood the Melasite.

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Let us mince words no further. *Point two,* I have come here for two things—Mrs. Preston and the garnet necklace you stole from her."

"Mrs. Preston?" said Casswood. "Oh, you mean Helen." He laughed. "I'll be glad to have you meet her. But why not let her decide for herself whether she wants to return? As for the garnet necklace, I don't know anything about it."

"Mrs. Preston is ill," said Trescot. "She's hardly capable of making decisions."

"She's not so ill as you may think."

Suddenly Trescot's calm manner left him. He stepped backward against the wall and raised his voice angrily. "We won't waste words, Casswood. The garnet! At once! Or I'll send you to your doom! I am prepared and equipped for this and more!" He held forth a silvery cross and took a bold step forward, raising his cane at the same instant.

Casswood jumped to attention, amazement bursting in his face.

"Amolgwie! Amolgwie!" he shouted, thrusting his hand inside his coat.

A whining, a yelping came from behind the closed door—and the sound of clawing paws.

"All right, Cheney!" yelled Trescot. "Smash through the window! Do you hear me, Cheney? Come in! But don't use the weapon yet!"

Trescot kept moving toward Casswood, holding the cross in one hand, and raising the cane ever menacingly in the other.

"Amolgwie! See vwan tow-pee-ah-h-h-vee! Amo-o-o-l-gwie!" Screamed Casswood, backing up with terror.

Glass crashed, and the big round rear of Dr. Cheney bulged against the shade. Then a brief scuffle as the doctor turned around and came in head first.

"Aim at his feet, Cheney," ordered Trescot, "but don't fire unless I tell you to!"

The whining, yelping, and clawing behind the inner door became more intense.

SUDDENLY Casswood pulled out the arm he had within his coat. For an instant something gleamed in his hand. He flung it on the floor. It smashed, whatever it was, and something spilled. A lurid red flash. Then a light mist began filling the room. With it, a pungent odor. Trescot recognized the odor at once. He had smelled it once before—a rare potent incense of counter-charm developed by an ancient Hindu centuries before Brahmanism.

Trescot's hand began to burn from the cross. He tried desperately to cling to it. He winced with pain. The scorching became unbearable and he dropped it.

"Ah-h-h-h!"

It was Nehemiah Casswood gloating. "You see now who holds the more powerful weapons, Trescot! You see now, perhaps, what a mistake it is to oppose the Melasites!"

"Shall I fire?" Cheney's hoarse voice boomed eager and impatient.

"No!" rasped Trescot. "In God's name don't fire while this stink is in the room. It would end us all!"

"Right!" chuckled Casswood. "I see you do know a little about it! What is it they say? A little knowledge is worse than none?" He was moving toward the door whence came the yelping. He was shouting like a gleeful maniac as he reached for the doorknob. "So you want to see Helen, gentlemen! Dear little Helen! All right, you shall see her! She shall make her formal entrance! You know how women are! They like to, shall we say, *put on the dog* sometimes? She won't seem so little to you now, though! You see she's all dressed up in her new furs! Come, Helen dear! Come, Helen! Some gentlemen have come to call on you! Your best manners, now! The tall gentleman is especially anxious to see you, so you must greet him first! *First,* I say!"

He flung open the door.

Then their eyes met her—a crouching beast—whose yellow eyes were gleaming, white fangs showing. Her body quivered. She yelped and whined alternately.

Trescot heard Cheney mutter "Good God!" But Casswood began again—

"Come on, Helen! You see, gentlemen," raved the Melasite, "Helen hasn't had any food now for nearly two weeks. She's really quite hungry. But I've promised her a meal very soon. Her diet, you know, is—well, she's very fussy—just blood and raw flesh—human preferred. I am her master, you know! Solely I! We will work together now, just for the Melasites! I guess you

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know, Trescot, what that means! Let her teeth tear your flesh, even ever so little, and you too will join the happy throng! Just . . . !"

The beast sprang. Casswood, fascinated, stopped to watch. It snarled as it darted for Trescot.

Cheney shrieked: "Watch out, Trescot! She's going for you! Trescot! Tres—!"

The doctor stopped in paralyzed amazement as he watched Trescot step toward the beast, deliberately raise his leg, thrust it toward the animal's snarling mouth. There was a sickening crunch. Trescot raised his cane, jabbed it at the beast's side and pressed his thumb on the cane's knob.

The creature uttered an uncanny howl, swayed, released Trescot's leg, and dropped to its side.

Nehemiah Casswood who had been standing by with smirking satisfaction, suddenly caught himself with alarm. But before he had time to move Trescot sprang at him. Again he raised his cane. He forced its point against Casswood's stomach and again pressed the cane's knob.

Casswood slumped.

"Quick, now!" shouted Trescot. "We've got to carry the beast to the car. She's harmless for five hours at least!"

It was heavy work, carrying the wolf-like creature through the window and to the car, but they managed it with surprising speed. They put her in the back seat, and started for town, now with the car's lights in full gleam.

"Reddington," said Trescot, "has a special room prepared for her. She will be safe there, with regard to herself as well as others. But we must hurry right back to Casswood. I'll have to arrange for his confinement elsewhere. He must be separated from all his paraphernalia and thoroughly bound before he revives. And, above all, we must find the garnet!"

FORTY-FIVE minutes later, about three o'clock in the morning, the beast was lying limp on a couch in a windowless, cell-like room at Trescot's house. The door contained an observation hole and was equipped with a prison lock.

Trescot and Cheney were downstairs being served coffee by Reddington.

"I think we'll need this little stimulant for what's still ahead of us," said Trescot.

Dr. Cheney appeared thoughtful. "I realize," he said, "that your cane was equipped with narcotic needles, but what about the beast's injury to your leg. It certainly. . . ."

"Oh, I'm glad you mentioned that," said Trescot, rising suddenly. "Now that you speak of it, my leg does hurt a little." He raised his trousers to the knees.

Dr. Cheney, about to take a sip of coffee, set the cup down again with surprise. He saw the metal puttees about each leg.

"I also have similar shields on each arm," said Trescot. "One above the elbow, one below." He put his hand down to his leg. "But look how her teeth dented this one! That's why it hurts. I guess I can remove them now. On second thought, I think I'll also take off this wig, mustache, and take out the plastics under my cheeks. As it turned out, all that fussing was a waste of time!"

Soon they were back at Nehemiah Casswood's. The light in the corner room, as expected, was still burning. They entered through the broken window, for they hadn't taken time when leaving to search Casswood's pockets for the key. Trescot entered the window first.

"Be careful of these splinters of glass," he warned.

But no sooner had he entered than he called in alarm.

"What is it?" demanded Cheney.

"He's gone!"

Cheney lumbered through as fast he could.

"Gone!" repeated Trescot. "Yet—yet here are his clothes!"

All the clothes Trescot had been wearing, including shoes and socks, were strewn about the room.

"Apparently," said Trescot slowly, "the effect of the dope on Casswood was shorter than normal. But I think I am beginning to understand!"

"What?" grunted Cheney impatiently.

"Just a minute."

Trescot was examining the clothing.

"Yes. These clothes have been badly ripped. It looks as though they were torn off and kicked off." He looked up. "Guard the window, Cheney. If you see anything, shoot quickly." The thought flashed upon

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him that perhaps he had removed his arm and leg guards too soon. He spread a handkerchief on the floor. As he took things from the pockets he laid them in the handkerchief. "Many of these things will prove very valuable to my study," he said. "And this thing in particular," he added softly, "will prove most valuable to Mr. and Mrs. Preston!" He laid carefully in the center a small trinket containing a yellow garnet. Then he tied the handkerchief together, including all the articles except the key to the door. "We'd might as well make our final exit properly," he said, putting the key in the door.

"I still don't understand what has happened to Casswood," said Cheney, peering nervously through the window.

"Well," said Trescot, "Mr. Casswood left via the window, as we did the first time. But he cut his foot on this little projection of glass. Come, we'll use my flashlight. Perhaps we will see some trace of bloody footprints on the porch."

They went out and he flashed his light on the porch floor.

"There! Do you see what I mean?"

Cheney gasped. But he didn't speak. Sure enough. There were footprints, plain, bloody ones—prints such as would be made by a large dog—or even a wolf, if there were any such things around!

"It would be useless to try following him," said Trescot. "He's probably slinking off far in the woods by now. We'll have to warn the police that we saw a mad dog in these parts!"

SEVERAL days later Trescot and Cheney sat in the former's living room. Opposite them in a chaise longue rested a pale though handsome woman in her early thirties. She wore a light-blue negligee and matching gown. Her only incongruous feature was hair prematurely gray. A yellow garnet, suspended from a fine silver chain, lay upon her breast.

Edmund Trescot sat with hands folded in front of his chest, his head characteristically tilted forward, and a lock of hair reaching down nearly to his eyebrow. The three had been conversing in calm but serious tones.

"You feel ready now to meet your husband?" asked Trescot.

Helen Preston closed her eyes a moment. "As much as I long to see him," she replied, "I'm nervous about it."

"I repeat," said Trescot, "that both Dr. Cheney and I promise you not to break this confidence. We realize your future happiness rests upon it. But, for the cause to which I am devoted, and which has saved you from the terror that only you can realize, I must beg you now to tell us your story."

Leaning forward tensely, Helen Preston spoke earnestly. "My gratitude to you both is beyond expression. I will tell you what I can, but it won't be all that you want to know. I was born in a small Vermont town. With the aid of a map I could show you about where it is. I lived there with my father and mother until I was twelve. Then two terrible things happened within a year. First, my father died. Of what I don't know. Shortly after I was kidnapped. I have a vague recollection of queer men and women around me in a small dirty shack, of strange goings on—like some kind of rites. Then I seemed to relapse into a long sleep with queer dreams—much like I have just been through again. When finally I awoke I was in the arms of an old man. He was something like the other queer people, but he spoke kindly. I have never forgotten his words. He said: 'My child, the Melasites have taken you into their tribe, but I am going to save you. Your father saved my life. He too is dead now. The only way I can repay him is to save you.' Then he handed me the trinket which I have kept ever since. 'Wear this, my child. Remember what I am saying. Always wear it, for the moment you take it off a terrible black doom will begin to fall upon you. Go home now. I will tell you the way. And remember: Once you fail to wear this little gift the Melasite enchantment into which you have been initiated will reclaim you.' When I got home my mother was sick and neighbors were in charge. Later I learned that she had gone insane before she died. I grew up with an unkind uncle and aunt. When I was nineteen I ran away. I went from place to place trying to get a job. It was as a final resort that I joined a burlesque. It wasn't a life I could adapt to. After the first few days I was worn out, a nervous wreck. I

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fainted on the sidewalk. A kind man picked me up, cared for me. He was fine, good, as he still is. I couldn't believe it when he told me he loved me. I had no doubt that I loved him. I've clung to him ever since. But I've never had the courage to tell him the truth of my past. He wouldn't believe it. Nor would he believe about the garnet. Nor would I blame him. When the garnet vanished I became panicky—and I guess, as you have seen, justifiably so. Nehemiah Casswood somehow had learned about me. Was determined to bring me back into the Melasite fold. I don't really know what or who the Melasites are. All I know is that to me they are horror."

Edmund Trescot bowed his head in his hand. "Unfortunately," he muttered, "Nehemiah Casswood is still at random. But in the name of all that is holy, I will track him down—wipe out his whole filthy tribe!"

Dr. Cheney jumped up. His bulldoggish face, his crown of red hair seemed all aglow. He thrust out his hand to Trescot. "And I'll be right with you, Trescot, right with you to the end!"

Then with a sheepish, almost childish face he reached into his pocket and handed Trescot the pistol. "Only, confound it, I hope next time I'll have a chance to use one of these. I've never pulled a trigger in my life!"

Trescot took it and laughed.

Reddington entered.

"Mr. Preston," said the servant, "is anxious to know when he may see his wife."

"Send him in right now," replied Trescot. "Come on, Cheney. Let's go out in the yard and have a smoke!"

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There Was An Old Woman

BY CHARLES KING

"KNIT one, purl one . . . *drat!*"

Incredibly aged fingers fumbled along the intricately patterned threads.

"Another knot!"

In the stillness of the bedroom, Joseph Block was certain that he could hear the pounding of his frightened heart. He looked again at the small, restless figure tossing in troubled sleep.

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

It was dark and in the dark an unimaginably aged woman knitted steadily . . . steadily

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"My son," he whispered, "my son please don't get sick. Please!"

It was the desperate invocation of a desperate father. It was an unashamed prayer from deep within the man. Then: "You're all I have since your Mother died, little Joe. You're my entire world, the future realization for my dreams. Nothing must happen to you . . . not if it costs my life!"

Withered fingers poked along the amazingly involved threads, then stopped. Like intelligent worms they explored the rough boundaries of the knot. "Hm-mm. This is going to be difficult. Untieing *this* knot will cause a weakness in the thread. That means breakage . . . *again!*"

Joseph Block removed his palm from his son's forehead. He looked frightened, and was.

Hurried strides brought him to the telephone, where his forefinger stuttered over the dial. "Hello . . . hello Doctor. This is Mr. Block. No, I'm all right—it's little Joe! I can't wake him up. . . . No! Thank God, not that! . . . it's just that he keeps tossing around in a very troubled—and deep—sleep. And his forehead is hot . . . very hot! You'll be over directly? Thanks, Doctor, thanks a million!"

The time before the Doctor's arrival wasn't long, but to Joseph Block the minutes stretched interminably. The face of the ticking clock seemed to grin wickedly. He was sure that the ticking had slowed down. He took out his watch to compare it with the clock. They both kept even pace, but now he was certain that his watch had also joined forces against him.

R-R-Ring!

He almost tripped in his hurry to get to the door. Nearly sobbing with relief, he led the Doctor into the bedroom.

"Tell me, Doctor, how does he look?"

"Relax, man. Take it easy. I don't want to have two patients on my hands. Now . . . let's take a look at the little fellow."

WATCHING the Doctor's skilled hands as they moved surely about brought a measure of relief. He tried to read the other's thoughts as the stethoscope moved about his son's chest, but the Doctor's trained face was inscrutable. On and on went the examination until the frantic father thought he'd go berserk. Acting childishly wouldn't help, he thought, and that helped him maintain control. Then, finally, the Doctor arose.

"Well, Doctor?"

It was a while before the other answered. Drywashing his hands absent-mindedly he seemed withdrawn into himself as if trying to solve some oddly abstruse problem. "I don't exactly know how to begin, Mr. Block. It's very . . . strange."

"Strange?" his voice was dissonant with shock. "What d'you mean? Isn't little Joe going to get well? Is he going to. . . ."

"Hold on!" Each word slowly distinct, as if he were trying to distill strength into the other, the Doctor continued: "I didn't say anything like that. . . . I'm not even thinking of it."

"Then?"

Again that drawn-out pause. "I'll be honest with you. I'll not freight my sentences with pompous medical terms. I'll speak to you as man to man." Silence. And, after a while, "Frankly, I don't know what is wrong with your son!"

"Oh, my God!"

"Wait . . . just a moment. There's nothing—absolutely nothing—that I can see to worry about. He has a slight fever, yes. But not enough to cause concern."

"Then. . . ."

"Please. To continue, what bothers me is *why* he should have this fever. He has no cold, nor the slightest symptoms of one, he has no evidences of anything that would force a fever," and, as the Doctor spread his hands wide with the palms upward, "plus the fact that my examination shows him to be sound organically."

Block looked a bit happier. "That means there's nothing to worry about . . . you said that yourself a while ago."

"Well," cautioned the other, "perhaps I didn't mean it exactly that way. Let's play this safe. Tomorrow, if his fever hasn't disappeared, bring him to my office where my equipment may point out the trouble."

After the Doctor's leavetaking, Block stood over his son's bed for a long time. He was doing something that he hadn't done for years. He was praying.

Later, he lay in bed listening to his son's restless breathing. Still later, mentally ex-

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hausted by the days' worrying he fell asleep. And he dreamed:

HE WAS standing in the midst of blackness . . . but he could see. Above him, the ceiling seemed enormous and far away. Then, curiously, it sloped down steadily. It was dark, but he saw an unimaginably aged woman knitting steadily. Her hands moved with practiced sureness.

"What are you doing, Mother?"

"You're a silly body, Joseph Block. Can't you see that I am knitting?"

"I'm sorry, Mother. What I meant was, what are you knitting . . . and why do it in this dark, dreary room?"

"You're a ninny, Joseph Black! If you had any sense you'd ask me about the knot I had to unravel before."

"Knot?"

"Yes, knot," she cackled crossly. "You'd be surprised how important it is . . . to you."

For the first time he felt the icy touch of fear. Somehow he didn't want to hear about the knot right now. "Excuse me, Mother, but you haven't answered the first of my questions. Tell me."

She raised her face and looked directly at him.

It came as a shock to him to see that she was completely blind. She had no pupils—only an expanse of greyish white matter.

"Tell you, eh? Very well, busybody. I'm an old, old woman with too much work. I've been knitting for . . . land's sake! I can't even remember how long. I'm so tired."

"Why don't you stop?"

Again those awful, sightless eyes flicked at him. "Hah! Don't think I haven't been tempted many times. But I'm not *that* cruel. I'm not. People say I am—they always have—but they're wrong, Joseph Block. I do the job that was given to me, do it as best I can."

"Aren't you afraid to be alone, Mother?"

There was genuine amusement in her chuckle. "Afraid? With the laces that can strangle galaxies? With the eyelets that see beyond all horizons? With the tongue that tells me of all things beyond the bourne? And with these threads that control your own puny globe? Don't you know *where* you are, Joseph Block?"

Terror washed over him in giant waves. His eyes roamed about again and what he saw was coupled with the meaning of her words. *He was in a shoe.*

"Now do you want to hear about the knot?"

"No, Mother . . . I . . ."

And he awoke.

Perspiration had reduced his pajamas to sodden, clinging cloth cylinders. He stumbled to the dresser and got into a fresh pair. Then, silently, he padded to his son's bed and stared down. Little Joe seemed to be sleeping easier. He was not tossing any more.

Block eased himself thankfully into his own bed. Smiling, he sought sleep . . . and found it.

"OH. YOU'RE back again."

Block looked at the crone patiently weaving her interminable patterns. "Yes, Mother. I don't know why—but I'm here."

Those twin greyish white expanses stabbed at him. "You're here because—though you're deathly afraid—you want to find out about that knot."

"Yes . . . you must be right."

"I'm *always* right," she cackled gleefully. "Well, ninny, you should have guessed about the patterns I knot. And about the thankless job that I was given. So many millions and millions to control, and when a body slips once in a while I'm berated. If I hadn't a conscience I'd let the whole shebang go to pot!"

Joseph Block couldn't speak. Fear clutched him with remorseless control.

She went on: "If people only knew how terribly hard it is to keep my patterns clear and definite." Complaint hung heavily on her sentences. "Don't those fools know that mere thread cannot hold out indefinitely? I ought to run my shears through the whole business . . . but I have a conscience."

Somehow Block was down on his knees. "The knot, Mother."

"That's what I'm talking about," she clucked exasperatedly. "Fraying threads, knots, constant repairs. To make one part strong sometimes weakens another part of the structure. Most often the nearest."

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"Mother, I don't understand."

"Fool! Aren't you the nearest one to your son?"

"Yes."

"Listen, then. His infinitesimal part of the entire pattern got caught in a knot. If not for my patience—which nobody gives me any credit for—"

"He would have died," Block finished.

"So. You finally begin to understand. But I cannot prevent certain things. Even *my* powers are limited. Read verse thirty-one of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam . . . an exceedingly gifted man . . . naturally not enough appreciated. Then there's a certain simple rhyme—" She suddenly caught herself up. "I forgot. You won't be able to."

Block was now lying down, face against the floor. His outstretched fingers kept scrabbling . . . scrabbling. . . .

"No, Joseph Block, you won't be able to. Because, in order to unravel the knot, the nearest part to it became frayed. I saved the knot—but not that part. I'm sorry. I always am."

But he didn't hear. His fingers were still.

WORRIED that he hadn't heard from Joseph Block all day, the Doctor hurried up the steps and into the apartment. He found little Joe fully dressed and frantically shaking his father, the latter still in his bed.

"What's the matter, son?"

"I'm scared. Scared! I got up this morning an' Pop was still sleeping. I didn't want to wake him so I went to school. . . ."

"You didn't feel sick . . . or anything?"

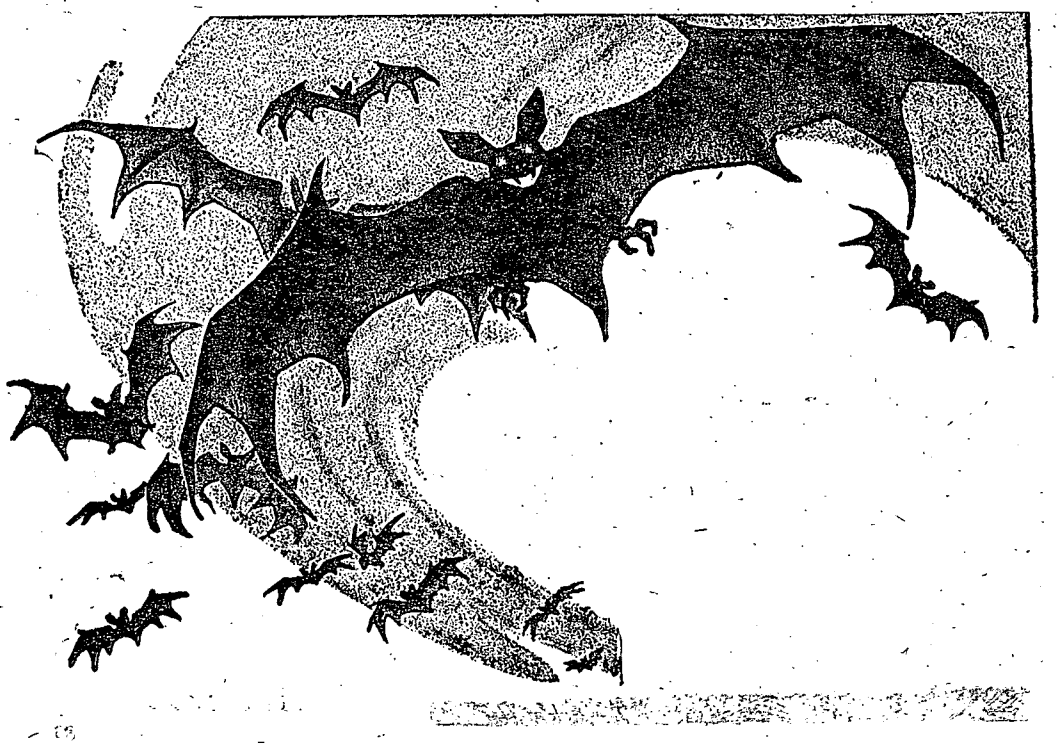
"Gosh no. Never felt better. Why should I feel sick?" Then, without waiting for an answer: "I got home from school and found Pop still in bed . . . an' . . . an' he won't get up!"

The Doctor looked down at the silent man in bed. His eyes narrowed. He picked up a limp wrist . . . and dropped it.

What had happened was nothing new to him. He had seen it innumerable times. And yet, and yet he felt panic squirming about inside him.

"My boy," he was striving to control his voice, "there's something I have to tell you. . . ."

. . . and put them to bed.



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The Seal-Woman's Daughter

By LEAH BODINE DRAKE

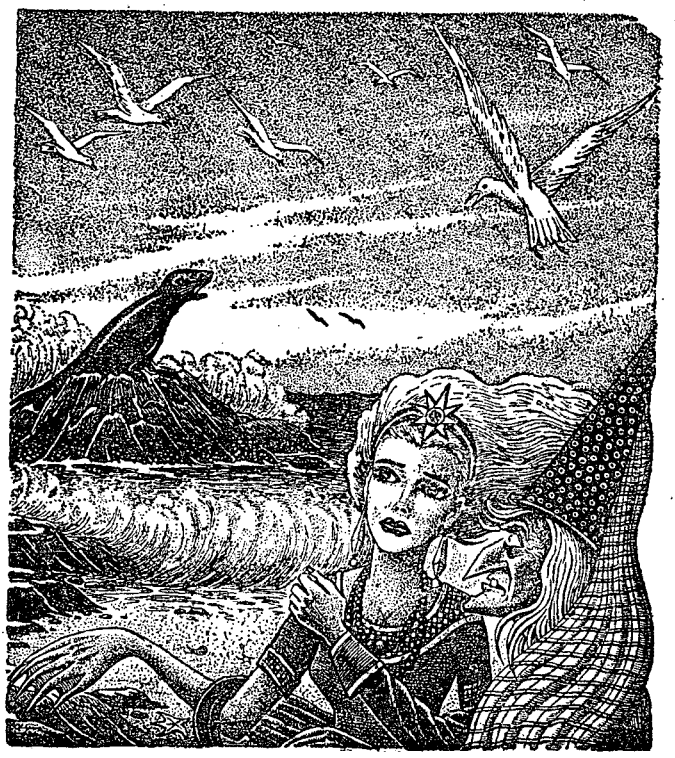
I AM half of the land
And half of the water,
For my dam was a seal
And I am her daughter.

I am sib to the land
And kin to the sea,
For my dam was a seal
But a king sired me.

My father has built me
A tapestry'd bower
Where twelve duke's daughters
Serve hour by hour.

Heroes and princes
Come wooing me,
But there is not one
Who smells of the sea!

My old nurse tells me
That I must beware
When I walk on the shore
With my unbound hair.



For out of the cold sea
A lover may rise,
Dark, sleek and furry,
With seal-brown eyes.

So I walk on the sands
When the gray winds blow,
Afraid of the waves
And what's below.

I sit with my maidens
And weave at my loom,
And my flesh rebels
At the fire-warm room.

For I'm not all beast,
And I'm not quite human,
Who has eyes of a seal
In the face of a woman.

And where can I rest,
A brown seal's daughter,
Who hates the land
And fears the water?

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The Handler

BY RAY BRADBURY

MR. BENEDICT came out of his little house. He stood on the porch, painfully shy of the sun and inferior to people. A little dog trotted by with clever eyes; so clever that Mr. Benedict could not meet its gaze. A small child peered through the wrought-iron gate around the graveyard, near the church, and Mr. Benedict winced at the pale, penetrant curiosity of the child.

His very good friends—always polite, cooperative, as only dead people can be!

Heading by LEE BROWN COYE

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"You're the funeral man," said the child.

Cringing within himself, Mr. Benedict did not speak.

"You own the church?" asked the child, finally.

"Yes," said Mr. Benedict.

"And the funeral place?"

"Yes," said Mr. Benedict bewilderedly.

"And the yards and the stones and the graves?" wondered the child.

"Yes," said Benedict, with some show of pride. And it was true. An amazing thing it was. A stroke of business luck really, that had kept him busy and humming nights over long years. First he had landed the church and the churchyard, with a few green-mossed tombs, when the Baptist people moved uptown. Then he had built himself a fine little mortuary, in Gothic style, of course, and covered it with ivy, and then added a small house for himself, way in back. It was very convenient to die for Mr. Benedict. He handled you in and out of buildings with a minimum of confusion and a maximum of synthetic benediction. No need of a funeral procession! declared his large ads in the morning paper. Out of the church and into the earth, slick as a whistle. Nothing but the finest preservatives used!

The child continued to stare at him and he felt like a candle blown out in the wind. He was so inferior. Anything that lived or moved made him feel apologetic and melancholy. He was continually agreeing with people, never daring to argue or shout or say no. Whoever you might be, if Mr. Benedict met you on the street he would look up your nostrils or perceive your ears or examine your hairline with his little shy, wild eyes and never look you straight in your eye, and he would hold your hand between his cold ones as if your hand was a precious gift, as he said to you:

"You are definitely, irrevocably, believably correct."

But, always, when you talked to him, you felt he never heard a word you said.

Now, he stood on his porch and said, "You are a sweet little child," to the little staring child, in fear that the child might not like him.

Mr. Benedict walked down the steps and out the gate, without once looking at his little mortuary building. He saved that pleasure for later. It was very important that things took the right precedence. It wouldn't pay to think with joy of the bodies awaiting his talents in the mortuary building. No, it was better to follow his usual day-after-day routine. He would let the conflict begin.

He knew just where to go to get himself enraged. Half of the day he spent traveling from place to place in the little town, letting the superiority of the living neighbors overwhelm him, letting his own inferiority dissolve him, bathe him in perspiration, tie his heart and brain into trembling knots.

He spoke with Mr. Rodgers, the druggist, idle, senseless morning talk. And he saved and put away all the little slurs and intonations and insults that Mr. Rodgers sent his way. Mr. Rodgers always had some terrible thing to say about a man in the funeral profession. "Ha, ha," laughed Mr. Benedict at the latest joke upon himself, and he wanted to cry with miserable violence. "There you are, you cold one," said Mr. Rodgers on this particular morning. "Cold one," said Mr. Benedict, "ha, ha!"

OUTSIDE the drugstore, Mr. Benedict met up with Mr. Stuyvesant, the contractor. Mr. Stuyvesant looked at his watch to estimate just how much time he dared waste on Benedict before trumping up some appointment. "Oh, hello, Benedict," shouted Stuyvesant. "How's business? I bet you're going at it tooth and nail. Did you get it? I said, I bet you're going at it tooth and—"

"Yes, yes," chuckled Mr. Benedict vaguely. "And how is your business, Mr. Stuyvesant?" "Say, how do your hands get so cold, Benny, old man? That's a cold shake you got there. You just get done embalming a frigid woman! Hey, that's not bad. You heard what I said?" roared Mr. Stuyvesant, pounding him on the back. "Good, good!" cried Mr. Benedict, with a fleshless smile. "Good day."

On it went, person after person. Mr. Benedict, pummeled on from one to the next, was the lake into which all refuse was thrown. People began with little pebbles and then when Mr. Benedict did not ripple or protest, they heaved a stone, a brick, a

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boulder. There was no bottom to Mr. Benedict, no splash and no settling. The lake did not answer.

As the day passed he became more helpless and enraged with them, and he walked from building to building and had more little meetings and conversations and hated himself with a very real, masochistic pleasure. But the thing that kept him going most of all was the thought of the night pleasures to come. So he inflicted himself again and again with these stupid, pompous bullies and bowed to them and held his hands like little biscuits before his stomach, and asked no more than to be sneered at.

"There you are, meat-chopper," said Mr. Flinger, the delicatessen man. "How are all your corned beeves and pickled brains?"

Things worked to a crescendo of inferiority. With a final kettle-drumming of insult and terrible self-effacement, Mr. Benedict, seeking wildly the correct time from his wrist-watch, turned and ran back through the town. He was at his peak, he was all ready now, ready to work, ready to do what must be done, and enjoy himself. The awful part of the day was over, the good part was now to begin!

He ran eagerly up the steps to his mortuary.

The room waited like a fall of snow. There were white hummocks and pale delineations of things recumbent under sheets in the dimness.

The door burst open.

Mr. Benedict, framed in a flow of light, stood in the door, head back, one hand upraised in dramatic salute, the other hand upon the door-knob in unnatural rigidity.

He was the puppet-master come home.

HE STOOD a long minute in the very center of his theatre. In his head applause, perhaps, thundered. He did not move, but lowered his head in abject appreciation of this kind, applauding audience.

He carefully removed his coat, hung it up, got himself into a fresh white smock, buttoned the cuffs with professional crispness, then washed his hands together as he looked around at his very good friends.

It had been a fine week; there were any number of family relics lying under the sheets, and as Mr. Benedict stood before them he felt himself grow and grow and tower and stretch over them.

"Like Alice!" he cried to himself in surprise. "Taller, taller. Curioser and curioser!" He flexed his hands straight out and up.

He had never gotten over his initial incredulity when in the room with the dead. He was both delighted and bewildered to discover that here he was master of peoples, here he might do what he wished with men, and they must, by necessity, be polite and cooperative with him. They could not run away. And now, as on other days, he felt himself released and resilient, growing, growing like Alice. "Oh, so tall, oh, so tall, so very tall . . . until my head . . . bumps . . . the ceiling."

He walked about among the sheeted people. He felt the same way he did when coming from a picture show late at night, very strong, very alert, very certain of himself. He felt that everyone was watching him as he left a picture show, and that he was very handsome and very correct and brave and all the things that the picture hero was, his voice oh, so resonant, persuasive and he had the right lilt to his left eyebrow and the right tap with his cane. And sometimes this movie-induced hypnosis lasted all the way home and persisted into sleep. Those were the only two times in his living he felt miraculous and fine, at the picture show, or here—in his own little theatre of the cold.

He walked along the sleeping rows, noting each name on its white card.

"Mrs. Walters, Mr. Smith. Miss Brown. Mr. Andrews. Ah, good afternoon, one and all!"

"How are you today, Mrs. Shellmund?" he wanted to know, lifting a sheet as if looking for a child under a bed. "You're looking splendid, dear lady."

Mrs. Shellmund had never spoken to him in her life, she'd always gone by like a large, white statue with roller skates hidden under her skirts, which gave her an elegant, gliding, imperturbable rush.

"My dear Mrs. Shellmund," he said, pulling up a chair and regarding her through a magnifying glass. "Do you realize, my lady, that you have a sebaceous condition of the pores? You were quite waxen in

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life. Pore trouble. Oil and grease and pimples. A rich, rich diet, Mrs. Shellmund, there was your trouble. Too many frosties and spongie cakes and cream candies. You always prided yourself on your brain, Mrs. Shellmund, and thought I was like a dime under your toe, or a penny, really. But you kept that wonderful, priceless brain of yours afloat in parfaits and fizzes and limeades and sodas and were so very superior to me that now, Mrs. Shellmund, here is what shall happen. . . ."

He did a neat operation on her. Cutting the scalp in a circle, he lifted it off, then lifted out the brain. Then he prepared a cake-confectioner's little sugar-bellows and squirted her empty head full of little whipped cream and crystal ribbons, stars and frollops, in pink, white and green, and on top he printed in a fine pink scroll, "SWEET DREAMS," and put the skull back on and sewed it in place and hid the marks with wax and powder. "So there!" he said, finished.

He walked on to the next table.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Wren. Good afternoon. And how is the master of the racial hatreds today, Mr. Wren? Pure, white, laundered Mr. Wren. Clean as snow, white as linen, Mr. Wren, you are. The man who hated Jews and Negroes. Minorities, Mr. Wren, minorities." He pulled back the sheet. Mr. Wren stared up with glassy, cold eyes. "Mr. Wren, look upon a member of a minority. Myself. The minority of inferiors, those who speak not above a whisper, those afraid of talking aloud, those frightened little nonentities, mice. Do you know what I am going to do with you, Mr. Wren? First, let us draw your blood from you, intolerant friend." The blood was drawn off. "Now—the injection of, you might say, embalming fluid."

Mr. Wren, snow-white, linen-pure, lay with the fluid going in him.

Mr. Benedict laughed.

Mr. Wren turned black; black as dirt, black as night.

The embalming fluid was—ink.

"AND hello to you, Edmund Worth!" What a handsome body Worth had! Powerful, with muscles pinned from huge

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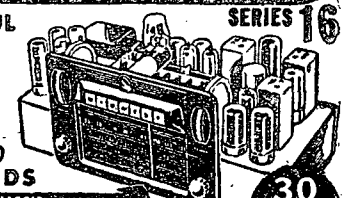

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bone to huge bone, and a chest like a boulder. Women had grown speechless when he walked by, men had stared with envy and hoped they might borrow that body some night and ride home in it to the wife and give her a nice surprise. But Worth's body had always been his own, and he had applied it to those tasks and pleasures which made him a conversational topic among all peoples who enjoyed sin.

"And now, here you are," said Mr. Benedict, looking down at the fine body with pleasure. For a moment he was lost in memory of his own body in his own past.

He had once tried strangling himself with one of those apparati you nail in a doorway and chuck under your jawbone and pull yourself up on, hoping to add an inch to his ridiculously short frame. To counteract his deadly pale skin he had lain in the sun, but he boiled and his skin fell off in pink leaflets, leaving only more pink, moist, sensitive skin. And what could he do about the eyes from which his mind peered?—those close-set, glassy little eyes and the tiny wounded mouth. You can repaint houses, burn trash, move from the slum, shoot your mother, buy new clothes, get a car, make money, change all those outer environmentals for something new. But what's the brain to do when caught like cheese in the throat of a mouse? His own environment thus betrayed him; his own skin, body, color, voice gave him no chance to extend out into that vast, bright world where people tickled ladies' chins and kissed their mouths and shook hands with friends and traded aromatic cigars.

Thinking in this fashion, Mr. Benedict stood over the magnificent body of Edmund Worth.

He severed Worth's head, put it in a coffin on a small, satin pillow, facing up, then he placed one hundred and ninety pounds of bricks in the coffin and arranged some pillows inside a black coat and a white shirt and tie to look like the upper body, and covered the whole with a blanket of blue velvet, up to the chin. It was a fine illusion.

The body itself he placed in a refrigerating vault.

"When I die, I shall leave specific orders,

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Mr. Worth, that my head be severed and buried, joined to your body. By that time I will have acquired an assistant willing to perform such a rascally act, for money. If one cannot have a body worthy of love in life, one can at least gain such a body in death. Thank you."

He slammed the lid on Edmund Worth.

SINCE it was a growing and popular habit in the town for people to be buried with the coffin lids closed over them during the service, this gave Mr. Benedict great opportunities to vent his repressions on his hapless guests. Some he locked in their boxes upside down, some face down, or making obscene gestures. He had the most utterly wondrous fun with a group of old maiden ladies who were mashed in an auto on their way to an afternoon tea. They were famous gossips, always with heads together over some choice bit. What the onlookers at the triple funeral did not know (all three casket lids were shut) was that, as in life, all three were crowded into one casket, heads together in eternal, cold, petrified gossip. The other two caskets were filled with pebbles and shells and ravels of gingham. It was a nice service. Everybody cried. "Those three inseparables, at last separated." Everybody sobbed.

"Yes," said Mr. Benedict, having to hide his face in his grief.

Not lacking for a sense of justice, Mr. Benedict buried one rich man stark naked. A poor man he buried wound in gold cloth, with five-dollar gold pieces for buttons and twenty-dollar coins on each eyelid. A lawyer he did not bury at all, but burnt him in the incinerator—his coffin contained nothing but a pole-cat, trapped in the woods one Sunday.

An old maid, at her service one afternoon, was the victim of a terrible device. Under the silken comforter, parts of an old man had been buried with her. There she lay, insulted by cold organs, being made cold love to by hidden hands, hidden and planted other things. The shock showed on her face, somewhat.

So Mr. Benedict moved from body to body in his mortuary that afternoon, talking to all the sheeted figures, telling them his

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every secret. The final body for the day was the body of one Merriwell Blythe, an ancient man afflicted with spells and comas. Mr. Blythe had been brought in for dead several times, but each time had revived in time to prevent premature burial.

Mr. Benedict pulled back the sheet from Mr. Blythe's face.

Mr. Merriwell Blythe fluttered his eyes.

"Ah!" and Mr. Benedict let fall the sheet.

"You!" screamed the voice under the sheet.

Mr. Benedict fell against the slab, suddenly shaken and sick.

"Get me up from here!" cried the voice of Mr. Merriwell Blythe.

"You're alive!" said Mr. Benedict, jerking aside the sheet.

"Oh, the things I've heard, the things I've listened to the last hour!" wailed the old man on the slab, rolling his eyes about in his head in white orbits. "Lying here, not able to move, and hearing you talk the things you talk! Oh, you dark, dark thing, you awful thing, you fiend, you monster, get me up from here. I'll tell the mayor and the council and everyone; oh you dark, dark thing! You defiler and sadist, you perverted scoundrel, you terrible man, wait'll I tell, I tell on you!" shrieked the old man, frothing. "Get me up from here!" "No!" said Mr. Benedict, falling to his knees. "Oh, you terrible man!" sobbed Mr. Merriwell Blythe. "To think this has gone on in our town all these years and we never knew the things you did to people! Oh, you monstrous monster!" "No," whispered Mr. Benedict, trying to get up, falling down, palsied and in terror. "The things you said," accused the old man in dry contempt. "The things you do!" "Sorry," whispered Mr. Benedict.

The old man tried to rise. "Don't!" said Mr. Benedict, and held onto him. "Let go of me!" said the old man. "No," said Mr. Benedict. He reached for a hypodermic and stabbed the old man in the arm with it. "You!" cried the old man, wildly, to all the sheeted figures. "Help me!" He squinted blindly at the window, at the churchyard below with the leaning stones. "You, out there, too, under the stones, help! Listen!" The old man fell back, whistling and froth-

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ing. He knew he was dying. "All, listen," he babbled. "He's done this to me, and you, and you, all of you, he's done too much too long. Don't take it! Don't, don't let him do any more to anyone!" The old man licked away the stuff from his lips, growing weaker. "Do something to him!"

Mr. Benedict stood there, shocked, and said, "They can't do anything to me. They can't. I say they can't."

"Out of your graves!" wheezed the old man. "Help me! Tonight, or tomorrow, or soon, but jump up and fix him, oh, this horrible man!" And he wept many tears.

"How foolish," said Mr. Benedict numbly. "You're dying and foolish." Mr. Benedict could not move his lips. His eyes were wide. "Go on and die now, quickly."

"Everybody up!" shouted the old man. "Everybody out! Help!"

"Please don't talk any more," said Mr. Benedict. "I really don't like to listen."

The room was suddenly very dark. It was night. It was getting late. The old man raved on and on, getting weaker. Finally, smiling, he said, "They've taken a lot from you, horrible man. Tonight, they'll do something."

The old man died.

PEOPLE say there was an explosion that night in the graveyard. Or rather a series of explosions, a smell of strange things, a movement, a violence, a raving. There was much light and lightning, and a kind of rain, and the church bells hammered and slung about in the belfry, and stones toppled, and things swore oaths, and things flew through the air, and there was a chasing and a screaming, and many shadows and all the lights in the mortuary blazing on, and things moving inside and outside in swift jerks and shamblings, windows broke, doors were torn from hinges, leaves from trees, iron gates clattered, and in the end there was a picture of Mr. Benedict running about, vanishing, the lights out, suddenly, and a tortured scream that could only be from Mr. Benedict himself.

After that—nothing. Quiet.

The town people entered the mortuary the next morning. They searched the mortuary building and the church, and then they went out into the graveyard.

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spread everywhere you could possibly look, as if the heavens had bled profusely in the night.

But not a sign of Mr. Benedict.

"Where could he be?" everybody wondered.

"How should *we* know?" everybody replied, confounded.

And then they had the answer.

Walking through the graveyard they stood in deep tree shadows where the stones, row on row, were old and time-erased and leaning. No birds sang in the trees. The sunlight which finally managed to pierce the thick leaves, was like a light-bulb illumination, weak, frail, unbelievable, theatrical, thin.

They stopped by one tombstone. "Here, now!" they exclaimed.

Others paused and bent over the grayish, moss-flecked stone, and cried out.

Freshly scratched, as if by feebly, frantic, hasty fingers (in fact, as if scratched by fingernails the writing was *that* new) was the name:

"MR. BENEDICT"

"Look over here!" someone else cried. Everybody turned. "This one, this stone, and this one, and *this* one, too!" cried the villager, pointing to five other gravestones.

Everybody hurried around, looking and recoiling.

Upon each and every stone, scratched by fingernail scratchings, the same message appeared:

"MR. BENEDICT"

The town people were stunned.

"But that's impossible," objected one of them, faintly. "He *couldn't* be buried under *all* these gravestones!"

They stood there for one long moment. Instinctively they all looked at one another nervously in the silence and the tree darkness. They all waited for an answer. With fumbling, senseless lips, one of them replied, simply:

"*Couldn't* he?"

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The Familiars

By H. P. Lovecraft

JOHN WHATELEY lived about a mile from town,
Up where the hills begin to huddle thick;
We never thought his wits were very quick,
Seeing the way he let his farm run down.
He used to waste his time on some queer books
He'd found around the attic of his place,
Till funny lines got creased into his face;
And folks all said they didn't like his looks.

When he began those night-howls we declared
He'd better be locked up away from harm;
So three men from the Aylesbury town farm
Went for him—but came back alone and scared.
They'd found him talking to two crouching things
That at their step flew off on great black wings.

The Pigeon-Flyers

By H. P. Lovecraft

THEY took me slumming, where gaunt walls of brick
Bulge outward with a viscous stored-up evil,
And twisted faces, thronging foul and thick,
Wink messages to alien god and devil.
A million fires were blazing in the streets,
And from flat roofs a furtive few would fly
Bedraggled birds into the yawning sky
While hidden drums droned on with measured beats.

I knew those fires were brewing monstrous things,
And that those birds of space had been *Outside*—
I guessed to what dark planet's crypts they plied,
And what they brought from Thog beneath their wings.
The others laughed—till struck too mute to speak
By what they glimpsed in one bird's evil beak

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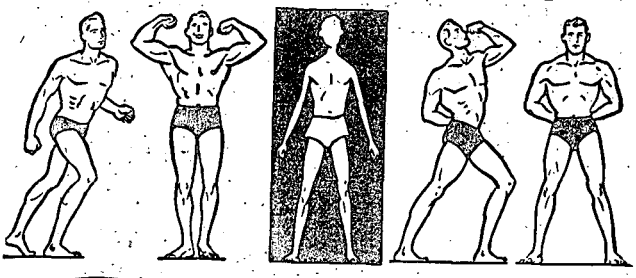

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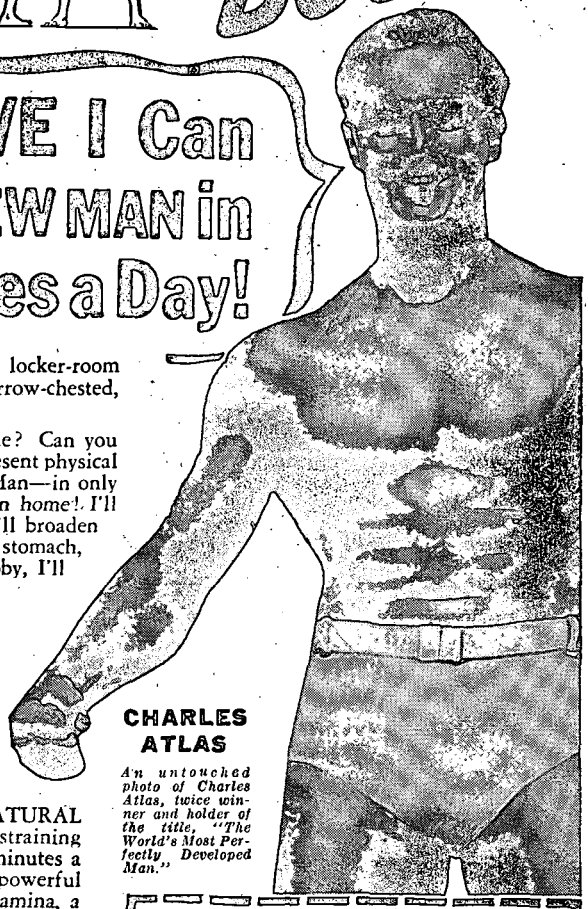

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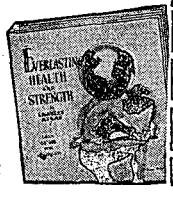

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